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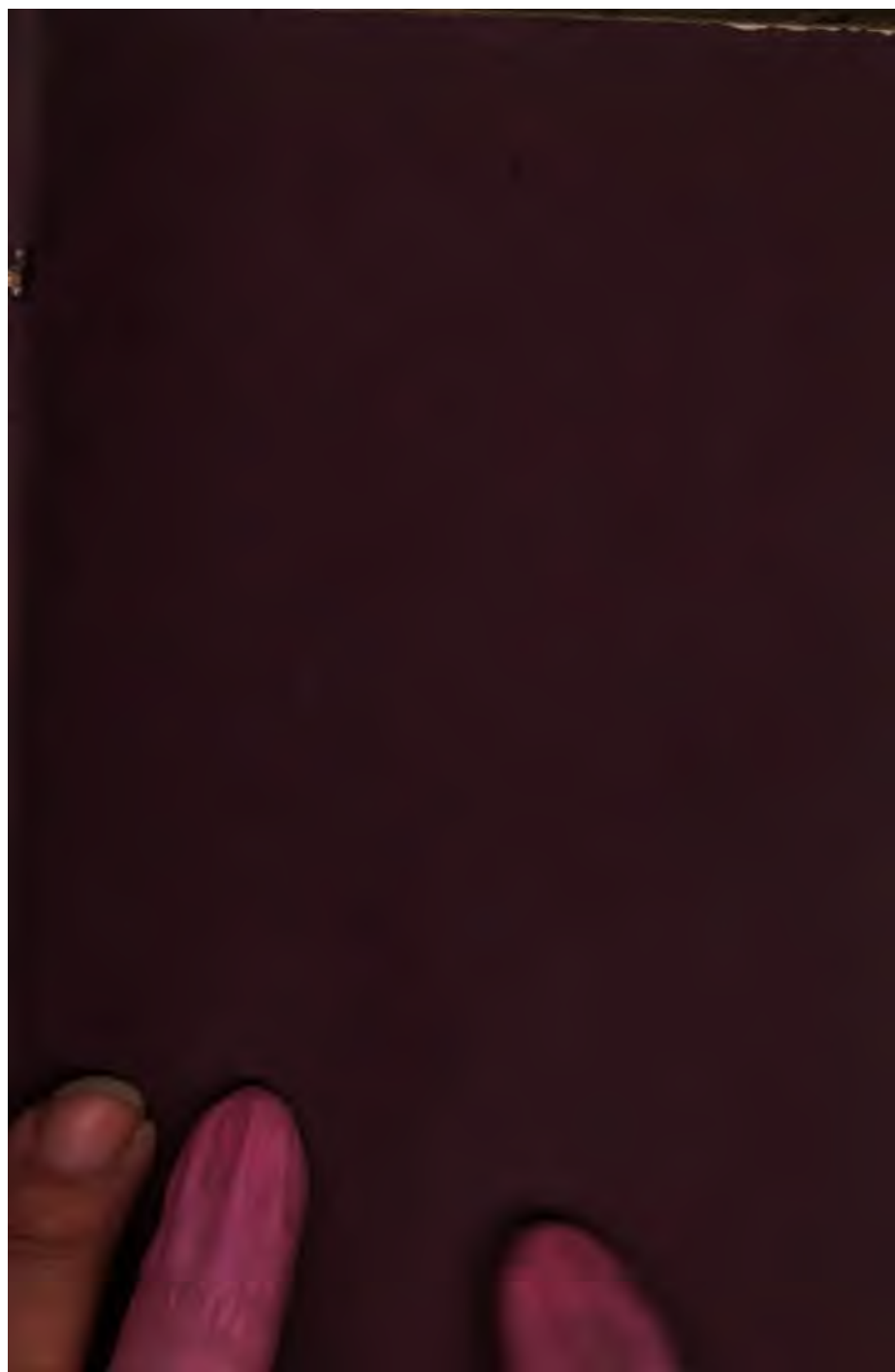
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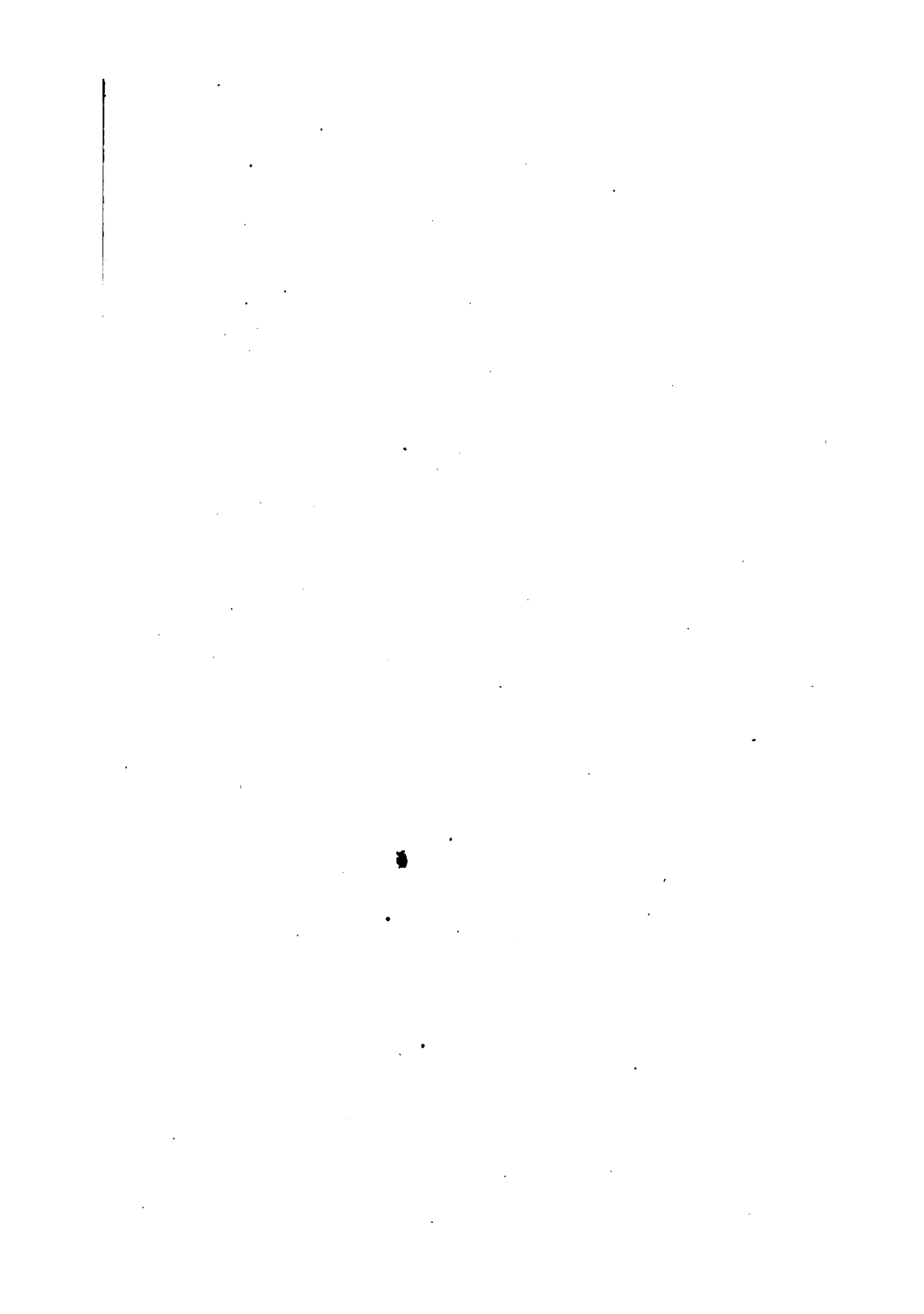




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MAUD LESLIE.

VOL. I.

MAUD LESLIE.

BY

LADY CHARLES THYNNE,

AUTHOR OF

"OFF THE LINE,"

&c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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MAUD LESLIE.

CHAPTER I.

“**H**AVE you sent out the invitations for the dinner-party we arranged to give next week, my dear?” said Mr. Hasseldine, coming hastily into his wife’s morning-room one bright day early in the Summer.

“Dear me, Mr. Hasseldine, how you startled me—coming in like that! No, not yet; we had not settled whether we should have eighteen or sixteen to dinner, or if we should ask the Fielders.”

“Well, then, I am quite sure now that

we cannot have them, for I want you to write an invitation to Mr. Stuart Leslie; he is staying at Conyers Abbey, and has been here to-day. He is the most charming, the most agreeable man," and Mr. Hasseldine paced up and down the room in a flutter of excitement and delight.

"Mr. Stuart Leslie! And pray, who may he be?"

"Mr. Stuart Leslie!" repeated his daughter in a very different tone, emerging from a corner of the room in which she had been lying curled up on a sofa, absorbed in a novel. "Do you mean Mr. Stuart Leslie the author, papa?"

"Yes, I do," he said importantly; "and you and your mother ought to be delighted at the prospect of seeing such a man, instead of making difficulties."

Mr. Hasseldine felt provoked that his proposal had not been received with more delight and alacrity.

"Difficulties! Who made any difficulties, Mr. Hasseldine?" replied his wife, in a tone of indignation. "But there is no use in even trying to please anyone as unjust as you always are."

Maud, who had a horror of a domestic squabble, came forward, saying,

"Oh, mamma, never mind; I want papa to tell me about Mr. Stuart Leslie, and why he came here."

"He came to see me, Miss Curiosity," replied Mr. Hasseldine, patting his daughter's cheek, "and if you wish to see him, you had better help your mother to write these invitations, and I will leave his myself at Conyers Abbey, if I ride to-day."

Maud Hasseldine seated herself at the writing-table, and, without further discussion, wrote the invitations at her father's desire. She could scarcely believe that she was actually writing to Mr. Stuart Leslie, and expecting to spend an evening in his company—the hero of her young imagination—for she had devoured his books and lived upon his poetry, till he had become her ideal of all that was intellectual and delightful. It was a childish piece of hero-worship, but Maud was only seventeen, and having just emerged from the school-room, though with less, perhaps, of young ladyism and sentimentality than usually belongs to that age, was still full of romance and high aspirations. She was both spoilt and worshipped by her parents, who always agreed in believing her to be

the most faultless as well as the loveliest of human beings. The first was a mistake, for she was wayward and impulsive, with most of the faults that belong to undisciplined youth; but her beauty, though as yet undeveloped and unformed, was an incontestable truth. Small, slight, and graceful, with a complexion as exquisite as the down on a peach, or a half-blown rose, she was relieved from all appearance of insipidity by her incessant change of expression, and the dark eye-lashes which shaded the large grey eyes—eyes that seemed to vary in colour with every passing mood.

Mr. Hasseldine was a very wealthy man. He had made his fortune as a banker in Liverpool, and had only recently become the possessor of Hurst Manor, a fine, old

property, though considerably impaired by the reckless expenditure of the late owner, who had squandered away a great portion of the estate before he was thirty. Mrs. Hasseldine, who both disliked her life in Liverpool and was ambitious of becoming a person of importance in ——shire, where she had lived before her marriage, no sooner saw the advertisement of its sale than she was unceasing in her importunities to her husband to purchase the place, which, as Maud was nearly grown up, he consented to do, thinking it would be more to her advantage to be introduced into the world as the daughter of a country gentleman than a Liverpool banker, for he still retained a share in the house.

It was some time before he could reconcile himself to such a complete change in

his life, but in the homage that in England is invariably paid to wealth, he soon found himself a person of considerable importance. He was a kind-hearted sort of man, and as a landed proprietor, a country gentleman, and a local magistrate he found ample vent for his bustling pomposity. It was considered such an advantage to the neighbourhood that a fine old place like Hurst Manor should not remain uninhabited, that all the leading county families had been eager to welcome the *nouveaux riches*, and, in consequence, the invitations when issued for the dinner-party the next week did not meet with a single refusal.

"They are all written, mamma," said Maud, rising to leave the room, and pushing the notes aside.

"Ah! my dear, I am very glad to be

saved the trouble of them. Your papa never cares what trouble he gives me."

Mrs. Hasseldine was rather querulous and indolent, and, above all, disposed to be a fine lady, and Maud was not in the mood to listen patiently to her mother's complainings. She ran quickly up into her room to find the last volume of Mr. Stuart Leslie's poems, and, seizing her hat, went through the garden into the shrubbery, where she had appropriated a seat under an old oak as her especial reading-place. It was at some little distance from the house, so that she could not be called in upon every pretext. This spot had an appearance of complete solitude, for it was situated on a hill from which the ground fell so abruptly that, with the exception of a few large trees that overhung the river

below, the eye only rested on the far blue distance. It was away from all the sights and sounds of life that surrounded the house, and was the scene of most of Maud's day-dreams. She was impatient to be alone—alone with her eager anticipations, and that wealth of trust and love that comes to us but once.

In after-life we indulge in day-dreams, and, perhaps, in fond hopes, but the golden halo that surrounded our early dreams is wanting, and the bright light that shone on the future has faded into grey twilight, and pales yet more and more as it is overshadowed by the carking care of daily life. But Maud was rich in youth and hope, and no fears dimmed her bright visions, as she sat with her hands clasped, looking into the far distance, enjoying

the greatest happiness that life can give.

She sat for some time absorbed in idle musing, till she suddenly remembered the book that she had brought out to read, and reproached herself for her idleness. Poor child ! she would not for the world have appeared ignorant of any of Mr. Stuart Leslie's works, if, as she fondly hoped, she should have the happiness of conversing with him. Poor, foolish child ! She had but little experience of men folk—certainly none of authors—to imagine that a self-contained, reserved man like Mr. Stuart Leslie would ever discuss the coinage of his brain or his inmost feelings with a little girl, for such he would consider Maud Hasseldine. But she had no such lowly ideas of her own importance,

and diligently devoted herself to reading his poetry, and to the study of his prose works, which, truth to tell, were somewhat above her powers of comprehension.

“Mamma, may I have the carriage to meet Helen Carysfort at the station?” said Maud to her mother at breakfast the day of the eventful dinner-party. “You know she is coming to-day, and I have just heard from her to say that she will be at Skipton at one o’clock.”

“Yes, my dear, certainly; and then we need not take the carriage out in the afternoon, which will be better, as the servants have so much to do,” she said plaintively.

Maud wondered how the coachman could have anything to do with cooking the dinner, but, having got the permission

she desired, was quite indifferent as to any other domestic arrangements.

“ You must not wait luncheon for us, mamma ; I daresay we shall be late.”

“ But, my dear, can you go alone, for I cannot possibly go ?”

“ Of course I can go alone, mamma— why not ?” Maud was not at all anxious for her mother’s company at her first meeting with her friend.

“ Maud need not go alone,” said Mr. Hasseldine, looking up from the letter in which he had been absorbed, “ for she may drop me at the bank, and then go on to the station. I shall walk home.”

Mr. Hasseldine’s business obliged him to go rather early, and to Maud the time that she had to wait at the station appeared interminable.

"Trains always are late," she said disconsolately, after having lingered on the platform till she was tired, and retreated for shade into the carriage. "If I had only brought my book!"

At last, however, to her great delight, Helen Carysfort appeared at the carriage door. Maud sprang forward to meet her.

"Dear Helen, how glad I am to see you at last!"

"I am charmed to come, dear. How well you are looking, Maud—as like a rose-bud as ever!" said her friend, looking admiringly at the bright little creature by her side, who, in the flutter of pink muslin and lace, and the little straw hat, with its wreath of wild roses, was as great a contrast as possible to her friend, in her quiet bonnet and dark grey silk dress.

Helen Carysfort was some years older than Maud, though their friendship had begun at school. She had been very kind to Maud when she was a little girl, and ever since it had been an understood thing that she should spend some part of the year with her. Maud was doubly anxious to see her friend, that she might show her her new home, and had been eagerly looking forward to this visit.

Helen Carysfort was a complete contrast to Maud in every way; very pale, with dark hair, and a sedate manner which had something cold and reticent about it that, at first sight, was not attractive. It was probably the great dissimilarity between the two girls that had made them such fast friends, for Helen had hitherto rather looked down upon Maud's childish,

impulsive character, though it was far more engaging than her own.

Maud was like a sunbeam, bright in itself and diffusing brightness around her. She and Helen had been not inaptly called Sunshine and Shade, and it was an exact representation of the two girls.

"I am so glad that you are able to come to-day, dear," said Maud, as the carriage drove away from the station. "I have so much to show you and to tell you, and Mrs. Boards is gone away for good, so I can do just what I like all day long."

"What a misfortune for you, Maud!" said Helen, smiling. "I thought that she was to stay another year."

"Mamma did think of it, and then when we came here papa said that it was non-

sense taking her so far from all her friends to send her back again, so he took a very small house for her in Liverpool, where she is living as happy as a queen."

"I thought you were very fond of her," said Helen.

"So I am, and she is to come and see me whenever she likes, but I have done with lessons now, I hope. Never mind poor old Mrs. Boards now. I want to tell you why I am so glad you came to-day. We are going to have a dinner-party."

"You don't expect me to be glad of that, I hope, Maud. I had much rather have been alone with you at first."

"But you don't know who is coming; guess."

"How can I? Some foreign prince,

perhaps, or the Indian man with an impossible name."

"As if I should care for those people," returned Maud contemptuously. "No; some one quite different—Mr. Stuart Leslie."

"Is he?" replied her friend, the slightest possible colour tingeing her cheek. "He is very agreeable."

"Do you know him then?" asked Maud breathlessly. "Oh, Helen! and you never told me!"

"There was nothing to tell. I spent some days at Middleborough with him in the Winter. I have not seen him since."

"I am glad you know him, Helen. You can describe him to me. No, I do not think I am glad after all," she added, after a pause. "I wanted you to be as

pleased as I am at the thought of seeing him. Now, of course, it is different," and Maud looked quite disappointed, and as if the charm of Mr. Stuart Leslie's company was gone. It was so odd too of Helen not to tell her before. She felt ruffled and put out, and did not seem inclined to talk of him any more; so the subject was dropped, but there was much to ask and to hear, and much to be admired, and by the time they reached the house Maud had quite recovered her equanimity.

CHAPTER II.

HURST MANOR was not the only place in which Mrs. Hasseldine's first dinner-party excited some sensation. It became the topic of conversation the evening before among the party at Conyers Abbey.

"Now do not say that I did not remind you that we all dine out to-morrow," said Lady Conyers, when the gentlemen joined her in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Not all, I am happy to say," said Lord St. Leger, the eldest son. "I believe I am to be spared that infliction, and Arthur is to go."

"Of course they meant to ask you, only they did not know your name, or something," said his brother Arthur, a shy youth of eighteen; "so that's all nonsense. I'm not going."

"Indeed you must, Arthur," said his mother decidedly; "though I feel, as you do, that it was a mistake. Still we cannot act upon it."

"Don't you think that my invitation was a mistake, Lady Conyers?" asked Mr. Leslie disconsolately. "I wonder what crime I have committed to deserve such a punishment?"

"You, Mr. Leslie! . Why, you are the one person that is of any importance. We are probably asked on your account. See what it is to be a distinguished author and a lion."

"Cannot I have the toothache and stay with St. Leger, or be called away for a few hours on important business?"

"Certainly not," replied Lady Conyers, laughing at his dismal countenance and manner. "And as to Arthur, he is much too young to give himself airs about invitations. He ought to be very grateful that he is asked; and, Mr. Leslie, remember that we have plenty of room for you in the carriage."

"Your ladyship is really too kind," said Mr. Leslie; and Lady Conyers laughed at his mocking gibe.

"Tell me a little of the *carte du pays*, dear Lady Conyers," said Mr. Leslie, as they were driving up the avenue to Hurst Manor the next evening. "What are these people? Millionaires, of course. I

knew the father in Liverpool. He was one of the principal bankers there, and I called there the other day on business ; but I know nothing of his family."

"Nor I, except that I believe that it consists of a wife and daughter. I think there were no sons."

"Lucky for you, Arthur," said his father. "You will have the first chance, as St. Leger is not here. Of course the daughter is an heiress."

"She is a deuced pretty girl!" said Arthur, suddenly joining in the conversation.

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Leslie, turning round to look at him, "Arthur is hooked already, and that is why he is asked instead of St. Leger. I am glad you told me."

"Stuff!" muttered Arthur, who had re-

lapsed into shyness. "I don't know these people. I only saw the girl at the Skipton Flower-show."

"Never mind, Arthur," said his father, laughing. "It's a great pull for you to see her now, so mind you don't let such an opportunity slip."

Maud was the first person in the drawing-room, listening eagerly as name after name was announced. At last came Lord and Lady Conyers, Mr. St. Leger, Mr. Stuart Leslie; but as soon as Maud heard Mr. Leslie's name, she turned away without looking up, so much did she dread the destruction of her ideal! When she did look up she hardly knew among so many unknown guests which to fix upon as Mr. Leslie, till she saw some one cross the room to speak to Helen Carysfort. He

did not altogether fulfil her expectations. He looked so grave, almost stern, till he smiled, when his face lighted up, and eyes and mouth smiled together, and then Maud said to herself that she had been wrong to be disappointed in him.

Mr. Leslie continued to talk to Helen till dinner was announced, when he gave her his arm, and all poor Maud's hopes fell to the ground, for they were seated at the far end of the table, where she could not even see them, nor amuse herself with further speculations upon Mr. Leslie's countenance. Maud thought the dinner long and tiresome, and felt thankful when she was again in the drawing-room, the atmosphere of which was cool and refreshing, away from the fumes of meat and wine, which are generally oppressive,

but intolerably so on a hot Summer's evening.

"Well, Helen, what did Mr. Leslie say to you?" asked Maud, impelled, as soon as she could, to speak to her friend.

"Nothing,—everything,—I mean, all sorts of things," she replied, looking surprised at Maud's cross-questioning. "It is a pity that he did not take you to dinner, Maud, instead of me."

"You don't think so, Helen," said Maud sarcastically.

"I never thought about it," she replied indifferently, as she turned away.

The drawing-room at Hurst Manor was a picturesque old room, which had been modernized by the high oriel windows being cut down to the ground, and made to open upon a terrace which looked

over the flower-garden immediately below.

Large Portugal laurels in tubs, and cut into shapes resembling orange-trees, myrtles, and a profusion of geraniums, made this terrace in itself another garden, and all were glad to take advantage of the beauty of the evening, and to linger out watching the clouds which were still tinted by the setting sun, till the sound of voices warned them that the gentlemen had left the dining-room, and brought back to the house the younger ladies who had ventured into the garden below. Maud, however, still lingered to enjoy the delicious scent of the roses, as she sat down listlessly on a garden seat, feeling weary and disappointed, and as if everything had gone wrong. Presently she heard footsteps, and saw her father and Mr. Leslie coming

towards her. She looked round for some way of escape, but was unable to find any before her father called her to come to him.

“What are you doing here by yourself, little one?” he said, putting his arm round her and drawing her towards him. “Mr. Leslie, I think you do not know my daughter.”

Mr. Leslie bowed, and as Maud, blushing deeply, held out her hand to him, he thought he had never seen a prettier picture. He made some common-place remark “adapted to a child’s comprehension,” Maud said to herself, with a momentary feeling of mortification, but soon remembered that the circumstances were not propitious for either a literary or metaphysical discussion. Indeed Maud looked

so fresh and young, so entirely childlike, that no one would have thought of entering upon any very abstruse subject with her.

"We have been admiring the beautiful prospect from your terrace, Miss Hasseldine," said Mr. Leslie, as they walked slowly back to the house. "I scarcely ever saw one so extensive, and yet it has all the charm of a home view."

"Yes; those large trees and the river make such a good foreground, and the dark purple line of distance is always lovely at this time of the evening."

"I want to induce Mr. Leslie to give us a few days before he leaves this part of the country. There is a good deal he has not seen. Try if you can persuade him, Maud. I believe that you are a fisherman," he

added, "and I am told the fishing is very good lower down the river."

"Do," said Maud eagerly, looking up with an expression few men could have resisted.

"I shall be delighted to accept your invitation," he replied. "I assure you that I do not require any inducement to do so. As to fishing, I believe I only like it as an excuse for idleness."

"I should not think your idleness ever needed an excuse," said Maud, in a low voice.

But Mr. Leslie caught the words, and looked at her with surprise, though he made no reply, and they joined the party on the terrace.

The evening passed off with the usual amount of talking, playing, and singing

that commonly follows a dinner in the country. But there was no longer any dulness or disappointment in Maud's mind, though she talked without knowing much what she was saying. All she did know, and that she repeated to herself over and over again, was that she was going to enjoy Mr. Leslie's society for days instead of hours. Some unexplained feeling made her shrink from expressing her delight to Helen Carysfort, and when her father mentioned it the next day, she made no comment, or any allusion to having known it before.

It is often very difficult to account for the influence that some minds acquire over others, even over those of far greater power, without, apparently, any adequate cause. Neither is it easy to account for

the fascination some writers have for a certain class of readers. They may readily acknowledge the superiority of many other books, but still they do not speak to their heart, or touch the spring of their inner life. The music does not harmonise ; it is not set in the right key. For this reason the fascination which Mr. Leslie had for Maud had its rise in her own sympathetic nature, and was, for the most part, the result of her *own* imagination, and the ideal she had formed *in* her mind.

Stuart Leslie's life had not been a very happy one. Even in his *childhood* he had been lonely and self-contained. He was *very* attached to his father, who was a man of considerable ability, and who died when he was yet a child, the grief he felt at his death seemed to take all brightness out of

his young life, especially as he had been left to the sole guardianship of his mother, a woman of a peculiar temperament, who was accustomed to rule, and jealous of contradiction. She could not bear to live alone, and therefore her son was deprived of all the advantages of College life, and debarred from the amusements and companionship belonging to his age. But he was of a quiet disposition, fond of study, and shrank from any contention with his mother, to whose selfish demands upon him he yielded without a murmur.

He was not popular in the neighbourhood, because his mother was disliked, and he was unknown, and as he was shy and reserved, people spoke of him as proud and unsociable.

He made only one effort towards emanci-

pation from his mother's rule, and that was successful. As soon as he was of age she allowed him to go abroad. He remained away nearly three years, and then returned apparently graver and more concentrated than ever. He soon resumed his literary pursuits, but it seemed as if some deeper shadow had come over his life, and that some hidden sorrow had stamped its impress on it. As he never spoke of himself, nor ever alluded to the past, if this were so, no one knew it.

CHAPTER III.

STUART LESLIE'S appearance before the world as an author necessitated a greater amount of communion with his fellow-men. His first work was very favourably received, and was quickly succeeded by another which made a still greater sensation. This to him was quite an unexpected success. He had written as a safety valve and an utterance. Literary work was his greatest pleasure, and he brought out book after book with a rapidity that spoke well for his ability and his power of work. He found himself *fêted* and sought after in a way that made it

impossible for him to lead the solitary life he had hitherto done, and, by degrees, he began to enjoy society that was congenial to him. In Italy he had fraternized chiefly with painters and sculptors, and had acquired a true appreciation of Art. But the society of the fashionable world was still irksome to him, though he was flattered and courted, and his presence deemed necessary to the success of every literary *réunion*. Praise has its effect upon all, even upon those who profess to be strong-minded enough to despise it. Upon Stuart Leslie it had the effect of bringing a more genial atmosphere around him, and of thawing the ice of reserve in which he had hitherto encased himself.

His lonely home, for Carrisbridge was situated in a solitary district among the

Fells of Cumberland, and in an exceptionally scanty neighbourhood, struck him year by year as more oppressively dull and dreary, especially as he had never taken any interest in the management of his property, but had left it entirely to his mother and his agent.

The dread of returning home after the life and interest of the London season made him gladly accept an invitation to Conyers Abbey, and, as his visit there was drawing to a close, he was not sorry to have an excuse for lingering longer in the south. He did not expect to derive much pleasure from Mr. Hasseldine's fussy vulgarity or his wife's affected gentility, but the rich wooded landscape, sunshine, and beautiful scenery possessed great attraction for him, and he was glad not to

spend the whole of the glorious Summer in his bleak moorland home. He had also been more captivated than he was aware of himself by Maud's childlike beauty, and rather wished to improve his acquaintance with Helen Carysfort, whose quiet good sense had impressed him very favourably when he met her at Middleborough. Underlying all, however, was a vague feeling that he might marry, that his mother wished it, and that it was a sort of duty incumbent upon him, as an only son, to do so. But this idea had not come before him in any very tangible way, yet sufficiently to make him take more interest in women's society than had been his wont.

As the day approached which had been fixed for Mr. Leslie's visit to Hurst Manor, Maud's anticipations ceased to be

altogether pleasurable. She had sundry misgivings as to whether he would not find it extremely dull, and, over and above that conviction, her intensely quick perception told her that probably he would find many things totally unsuited to him. What possible subject could he have in common with her father, and still less her mother, and, "as to me," said Maud to herself, and her lip curled rather scornfully at the idea, "it is easy to see that he looks upon me as an ignorant baby. There is Helen, to be sure, perhaps Mr. Leslie may think her worth talking to; but oh, dear, I wish, after all, that papa had not asked him to come here!"

With this in her mind she went into the library, where Miss Carysfort was busily engaged in writing.

"I want to talk to you, Helen ; I want to know what you think."

Her friend looked up from her letter, waiting for further explanation.

"Don't you think it would be much better for mamma to ask some people to meet Mr. Leslie when he comes?"

"Why, Maud?—and who?"

"Because he is sure to be so bored here; I don't know who—anybody—people that will come to dinner."

"I did not think that your experience of giving dinner-parties, Maud, was so very delightful as to make you wish to give another so soon," said Helen, dryly.

Maud coloured, annoyed at her friend's manner.

"I don't wish it at all; I only asked you what you thought."

"I think it would be a mistake. Why should Mr. Leslie be especially dull here? He is not a man without any resources in himself. He draws very well, for one thing. I spent a week in the house with him at Middleborough, and he did not seem at all bored."

"But that was different," interposed Maud, quickly.

"Very ; not a pretty place or such an enjoyable house. The Lawtons are poor, and have a nursery full of children."

"He may like children, and if the people themselves are clever and pleasant it cannot matter whether they are rich or poor."

"I am sure the people that you would get to meet Mr. Leslie here would give him no pleasure, and that it would be a great mistake," said Miss Carysfort ear-

nestly, adding, "I was just writing to my aunt to say that I proposed to stay here another fortnight, if you like me to do so, Maud."

"Of course—you must not leave us. It is impossible that we could spare you now."

Maud spoke very eagerly, partly from a doubt that suddenly sprang up in her mind whether, notwithstanding her wish for "people," Helen's departure would not be rather a relief than otherwise.

"I felt sure you would not like me to go just now," said Miss Carysfort quietly, though she partly read what was passing in Maud's mind. "Mr. Leslie will be very happy, dear, never fear."

Maud said no more; but on the morning of Mr. Leslie's arrival busied herself in a very unusual manner to decorate the

drawing-room with a profusion of flowers, greatly to the dismay of the gardener when he saw her with garden gloves, baskets, and scissors, cutting ruthlessly right and left, utterly regardless as to whether the roses she cut were buds or full-blown flowers. She selected the choicest flowers, carried them up into Mr. Leslie's room, and arranged them carefully in an old China bowl. Then she placed the daintiest little bouquet of geraniums and jessamine in a glass on the dressing-table. She stood considering her work for a few minutes, and then thought—"Perhaps he will ask who put this in his room, and I should not like to tell him. I had better not leave it there," and she carried it reluctantly away.

Nothing satisfied Maud in the appear-

ance of the room except her own roses. The carpet was ugly, the curtains heavy and dingy, the furniture altogether dull and common-place. What could she do to enliven it? Books!—it wanted books. Of course, he would be miserable without books. But what kind of books? Some had just come from Mudie's, but they were all novels, and probably he would not read novels, only solid standard works.

Accordingly, Maud went into the library, and gravely contemplated the bookshelves. Hallam's "Middle Ages," Gibbon's "Roman Empire"—these are too dry; besides, of course he knows History. Swift, Sterne, Boswell's "Life of Johnson," Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful—perhaps that might do, and Maud took the volume down. Poetry—Byron, Cowper, Campbell, Scott

—“Of course he knows them all by heart. How I wish I knew what he would like! Shakespeare—of course that would do; no one is ever tired of Shakespeare, and it is prose, and poetry, and everything else in the world. It is a large copy, but some one said it was a very fine one only the other day. I will take that,” and Maud toiled upstairs with volume after volume of a large copy of Shakespeare, and arranged them on a bookshelf that stood empty in the room. As she was on the point of carrying up the last volume, she met her mother.

“My dear child, what are you doing? I saw you in the garden cutting flowers in the broiling sun, ruining your complexion, and tiring yourself to death. If you want flowers, pray send to the gardener.”

"I am not tired, mamma, only rather hot, and I wanted to choose them myself."

"But why do you take the books out of the library?" asked her mother, feeling that Maud's proceedings were in some way very strange. "Look at this large empty gap in the shelf. Don't let your father see it, pray. What will he say?"

Maud was rather dismayed at the appearance of the bookshelf, and said she would put them back again.

"I only took them down as I wanted to put some books into Mr. Leslie's room, mamma," she said, apologetically.

"But why should you? Who ever thought of putting books in a bed-room?—no one reads there. What is the use of having a library? Such elegant books as these were never meant to be put into

a bed-room—Russia leather binding and gilt leaves.”

“What can the outside of a book matter, mamma?”

“I think it matters very much. I got all those books—and very handsome they are—at old Vincent’s sale some years ago. I bought them by the yard on account of their bindings, and a long price I had to pay, I can assure you. Your papa was quite angry about it, so you need not treat them as if they were of no consequence.”

“I think them of the greatest consequence, mamma, only I never should care for any book for its binding. But I will put them back,” said Maud meekly, feeling that she had not been very judicious in her proceedings.

"No, indeed, Maud, you will do no such thing. Ring the bell. You are just like your papa, always ready to do things for yourself. I am only too glad to find something for all these servants to do."

"It takes so much longer, and it is so much more trouble to tell other people," said Maud. "By-the-by, mamma, did Helen tell you that she has written to her aunt to say that she wishes to stay here another fortnight?"

"No; but I am glad she stays, for I do not fancy it is 'etiquette' to invite a man like Mr. Leslie to stay in the house, and then not have anyone to meet him," said Mrs. Hasseldine, fanning herself vigorously, and arranging her cap-strings.

"I thought so. Helen said not."

"How can she know? Really, Maud,

the way you mind all Miss Carysfort says is too absurd. One would think you did not care for anyone else."

Maud felt guiltless on that score; but she never discussed her feelings with her mother, and the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER IV.

MAUD was obliged to acknowledge to herself that her fears about Mr. Leslie were unfounded. He seemed perfectly contented, and evidently took great interest in politics, farming, the growth of crops, and the cultivation of land, on which topics Mr. Hasseldine was perfectly competent to converse. The first evening was principally spent in discussing subjects of this kind, and it was poor Maud, and not Mr. Leslie, that was intensely bored.

“ Well, he cannot always talk about corn and land,” she thought, as she laid her head upon her pillow that night. “ To-morrow,

perhaps, he will talk of books; only I cannot think how to begin."

A few days after, at breakfast, Mr. Leslie inquired about a picturesque old mill that he had noticed in his rides at Conyers Abbey, and wished to sketch.

"I think it cannot be far from the village," he said. "Can you tell me in what direction it lies?"

"It is quite near. I can show it to you this morning, Mr. Leslie, if you like," said Maud eagerly.

"I shall be very glad, if it is not taking you out too early. I believe ladies seldom walk in the morning."

"We do, Helen, don't we? There is plenty of shade by the mill-pool, and we can sit there while you draw."

As soon as breakfast was over, Maud

ran upstairs to get her hat, that there might be no delay when Mr. Leslie was ready to walk; but, unfortunately, she met her mother as she was hastily coming down, who told her to come into her sitting-room before she went out.

“But I am going now, mamma,” said Maud impatiently. “Won’t it do when I come in?”

“No, my dear. I want you now. You cannot be in such a wonderful hurry. Besides, I am not altogether sure that it is the right thing for you to be walking about alone with gentlemen.”

“Alone, mamma,” repeated Maud, colouring with annoyance. “I never walked alone with gentlemen in my life. Mr. Leslie wanted to draw the mill at Chute, and Helen and I were going to show

him the short cut across the fields."

"Perhaps that may not matter, but you seem to think a great deal about Mr. Leslie, Maud," persisted her mother, who was thinking of the trouble she had taken in arranging flowers, and the incident of the books the day Mr. Leslie arrived.

"I am sure I don't care, if you don't like me to go out," said Maud pettishly, throwing her hat down on the ground. "What am I to do?"

"What I wanted you to do was to write to Mrs. Boards, and beg her to send the housemaid she has engaged for me immediately. She is expecting a letter from you."

"That need not take long, at all events," thought Maud, as she sat down and wrote a few lines to her old governess from her

mother's directions. Then she took up her hat to join Mr. Leslie and Helen, but neither was to be found.

Maud's heart beat fast, the colour rushed into her cheeks, and her eyes looked ominously bright as she hastily opened the library door and looked in. Mr. Hasseldine was writing, but seeing who it was called to her to come back.

"Come here, my pet, what do you want?"

"Nothing, papa. I thought that perhaps Helen and Mr. Leslie were here."

"I saw them cross the garden more than ten minutes ago. I fancy they were going towards the village. Have they stolen a march upon you, Pussy?"

Maud could not trust herself to speak, and muttering something her father could

not hear, quickly retreated. She was both wounded and disappointed, Wounded to the quick at Miss Carysfort's taking advantage of her delay, to carry off Mr. Leslie, and disappointed to be deprived of the pleasant conversation she had looked forward to. She had hoped for a literary discussion, and to be able to show Mr. Leslie that she was not quite such an ignorant child as she imagined he thought her. Should she follow them? It would be very easy to overtake them if she set off at once. No; her pride would not allow her to do that. As they had preferred going without her, she would not force her company upon them. Possibly Mr. Leslie might wish to see Helen alone. She did not blame him; but with Helen it was an entirely different thing. She

did not see how she could forgive her.

Maud was right to exonerate Mr. Leslie in the matter, for the thing happened in this way. When Miss Carysfort came down dressed to go out, she found Mr. Leslie standing at the window with his sketch-book in his hand.

"Are you one of those who cannot draw without a camp stool?" she asked, with a smile, "as, if so, I think I can find one."

"Certainly not. In weather like this the grass is as good a seat as can be desired. I was only waiting for Miss Hasseldine."

"For Maud?" she replied, with some surprise. "I do not think she is coming."

"Really! I thought she was the originator of the scheme."

"That is very possible," returned Miss Carysfort; "but, though Maud is a dear child, she is very impulsive, and but few of her impulses last a quarter of an hour. When I came downstairs I saw her writing in Mrs. Hasseldine's sitting-room. I will go and ask her, if you wish her to come, but I know the short way to the mill perfectly well. I walked there just before you came."

"Pray do not disturb her if she is engaged," replied Mr. Leslie quickly, but Helen saw that he was disappointed, and was, in consequence, more eager to go at once.

They walked across the garden, and then under the shade of some large elms until they came to a common where the sun shone down upon their heads with all

its fierceness. It was oppressively hot. The mill was at the far end of this common, and after a few minutes they both turned to rest and admire the view.

"Have you known Mr. Hasseldine long, Mr. Leslie?" asked Miss Carysfort, rather at a loss how to sustain a conversation which, from her companion's pre-occupation, seemed continually to flag.

"I have often seen him in Liverpool, but only in the way of business. Removing from a great city to this lovely country must have been a delightful change for Miss Hasseldine."

"Yes. I think Maud likes it at present. She would like anything new. As to this place, she probably will not be here long enough to get particularly attached to it."

"Why?" he asked, with a start of sur-

prise. "I thought Mr. Hasseldine was a very wealthy man."

"I did not mean that the place would be given up. I was alluding to Maud's marriage."

"Is she engaged to be married already?"

"No; but it is always supposed that she will eventually marry Lord St. Leger. The properties join, and Mr. and Mrs. Hasseldine want rank for their daughter, and Lord and Lady Conyers want money."

"Of course it is not of much consequence what Lord St. Leger and Miss Hasseldine want in the matter," said Mr. Leslie sarcastically.

"Probably not," said Miss Carysfort, with an uneasy laugh, for she did not altogether understand Mr. Leslie's manner.

"Maud would do whatever her parents told her, and probably Lord St. Leger would not object."

"I do not agree with you, Miss Carysfort," said Mr. Leslie gravely. "St. Leger is an old friend of mine, by no means mercenary, and, as a matter of fact, I do not believe he ever saw Miss Hasseldine."

"Perhaps not. I believe it is the younger brother that she knows; but a marriage so advantageous to both parties, and so much wished by the parents on both sides, is tolerably sure to come to pass."

"Marriages arranged in that way seldom do come to pass," replied Mr. Leslie, in a tone of annoyance.

He felt provoked at the depreciating manner in which Miss Carysfort spoke of Maud, and wondered what he could ever

have found attractive in her. He could not analyse his own feelings, which were certainly anything but pleasurable at having Maud's marriage with Lord St. Leger talked of as a probability, and yet what was that bright gay child to him? He was altogether put out, and would like to have wandered on alone. It was intolerable to him to have to be polite to Miss Carysfoot, to whom he had suddenly taken a most unreasonable aversion.

"It is frightfully hot," he said, after a minute's silence, "almost too hot to draw, I am afraid."

"We are so near the mill, it would be a pity to give it up," said Miss Carysfort gently, glancing stealthily at her companion's clouded brow. "Perhaps Maud may join us there."

"I hope she will not. I am sure she had much better stay at home than cross this scorching common," he replied crossly. "But, as you say, being here, it is best to go on."

He did not wish to appear annoyed by Maud's absence, and, if he returned home without attempting to draw, Miss Carysfort would undoubtedly attribute it to that cause. Neither could he at that moment endure to sit for an hour listening to Miss Carysfort's uninteresting remarks, and yet Mr. Leslie had thought her the only agreeable woman at Middleborough. He was truly inconsistent, after the manner of men.

Then he resolved to remain, and prefaced his decision by saying that he was especially sorry that Miss Carysfort was alone, as

not being able to talk and draw at the same time made him necessarily an unsociable companion. Helen Carysfort assured him, however, that it was not of the slightest consequence—that she preferred reading, and always carried a book in her pocket, which she produced, and sat down at a little distance, apparently absorbed in its contents, but in reality she was pondering with some vexation on the failure of her scheme in carrying off Mr. Leslie alone.

“It is very odd,” she thought, “for he certainly preferred me to anyone at Middleborough, and it is inconceivable that a child like Maud should have any especial attraction for him.”

Mr. Leslie soon finished his sketch, and after it had been duly criticised and approved by Miss Carysfort, they returned

home and found Maud sitting in the garden with a book in her hand, which, as it was not open, had not, apparently, as yet engaged much of her attention.

"So you deserted us, Miss Hasseldine," said Mr. Leslie, going up to her and sitting down by her side. "It was hardly fair, as the idea of going to the mill came originally from you."

"I don't think the desertion was mine," said Maud quickly, and with a rising colour, "for when I came down you were gone."

"Yes; because I understood that you were engaged and could not come."

"Who said so? Did Helen?" asked Maud, with a flash of indignation in her eyes that made her appear suddenly beautiful in Mr. Leslie's eyes. It gave the

character and force that were, perhaps, wanting to her countenance.

"Yes; she told me you were writing upstairs."

"Mamma did ask me to write a note for her, but it did not take any time, and I did not understand that there was any especial hurry," she said coldly.

"Certainly not. I would gladly have waited any length of time, sooner than have been deprived of your company," said Mr. Leslie, in a very different tone.

"It cannot signify now, Mr. Leslie. May I see your drawing?"

"It does signify very much to me," he replied earnestly. "The drawing is not finished. If I go again, may I depend upon your going also?"

"Certainly. That is if——"

"If what?" he asked curiously, looking into her face.

"I mean that I could have come to-day, for I might soon have overtaken you, only I did not wish to be in the way," she said, blushing deeply.

Mr. Leslie was silent for a moment, and then said,

"Will you make me a promise?"

"Yes, if I can; but I cannot tell till I know."

"Never again to think it possible to be in the way where I am. Will you promise me this, whatever anyone may say?"

"I can easily promise that, for I should like to believe it," she said frankly. "Now may I exact a promise in my turn?"

"Anything, everything," he replied, looking, as he felt, quite bewitched by her

simple child-like manner and exceeding loveliness.

"That is rash, as you may not like to fulfil it. It is to read some of your last volume of poems to me. I am not sure that I understand them all."

"As if I could be" anything but too much flattered that you should think them worth reading. When shall it be? Now?" he asked, taking the book out of her hand.

"This was what I was reading," said Maud timidly, "and there are small allusions that I do not understand."

"It is scarcely to be desired that you should," said Mr. Leslie, with a smile. "Heathen mythology is not altogether the most fitting study for young ladies."

"Then you cannot explain them to me,"

said Maud, looking disappointed. "I am sorry for that. I always feel like an impostor when I am reading what I do not understand."

"I daresay I can explain it sufficiently to take away such a very uncalled-for feeling," he said, and then proceeding to give a short and clear explanation of the passages that Maud had found difficult to understand, soon saw by her eager attention and intelligent remarks that he was not bestowing useless labour upon her. After this he read a poem that was an especial favourite of his own, and that he saw Maud had marked.

Mr. Leslie was one of the few men who are gifted with the talent of reading aloud. He had a rich musical voice and a remarkably distinct articulation. Maud

sat entranced while he read, with folded hands, pale cheeks, and eyes that often filled with tears. She sat silent and motionless—she could not have spoken—it would have broken the spell of her dream-world—she only wished that those heart-stirring words should never cease, and that she could listen for ever.

“I have tired you, I am afraid,” he said at length, rather surprised at Maud’s continued silence.

“Tired me!” she said. “Oh, if you only knew how happy I have been!”

“If it is a happiness it is one you can always command,” he said, taking her hand and holding it for a moment between his own, as he returned the book.

Maud blushed at the warm interest and admiration so placidly depicted on his

countenance. She felt intensely happy, and thought she had been amply compensated for the disappointment of the morning.

Days passed, and yet Stuart Leslie lingered on at Hurst Manor, more and more fascinated by Maud's child-like beauty and frank, simple nature. Miss Carysfort had returned home, so that Maud and Mr. Leslie were thrown continually together. Everything she did, even her wilfulness and caprice, interested him. She was like a sunbeam that penetrated the depths of his being, and lighted up his somewhat gloomy and reserved nature. As she became more at home with him he was often witness to small ebullitions of temper and pettishness, but even Maud's faults had a charm in his

eyes, and these transient shadows passed away as quickly as a cloud in the Summer sky. Every mood had an especial charm for him, every day wound her more closely round his heart.

“When pensive, it seemed as if every grace
That charm of all others was born with her face ;
And when angry—for e’en in the tranquildest climes
Light breezes will ruffle the flowers sometimes—
That short passing anger seemed but to awaken
New beauty, like flowers that are sweetest when
shaken.”

She was an entirely new revelation to Stuart Leslie. The images that had for the most part surrounded his youth had been stern and unlovely; those of later years frivolous and uninteresting. He knew that he ought to return to Carrisbridge—to his house and his duties—though he often said to himself that he never could discover what those duties were.

Meanwhile his mother, according to the tradition of ladies in feudal times, was sitting disconsolately at her casement, watching for her son, and occasionally, after the manner of Blue Beard's unhappy wife, called in vain to the humble companion of her dreary solitude, to know if "anyone was coming;" but still the answer was in the negative, and, what was worse to the imperious lady, not a line from Stuart in explanation of his prolonged absence. She knew that he had left Conyers Abbey, but knew of no other address. Stuart had delayed writing till he could tell her positively what day she might expect him to arrive. In the meantime he had become more passionately in love with Maud day by day. He could not bear to think of leaving her, and was

not proof against the sorrow expressed in her countenance whenever the question of his return home was mooted.

CHAPTER V.

MORE than sixty years before, a raid was made upon one of the rocky sea-girt islands on the north-west coast of Scotland by a party of young Englishmen. During the Oxford long vacation, a reading party, in reality bent more on pleasure—on fishing and shooting—than on study, sailed round that coast in a small yacht belonging to one of them. The astonishment of the islanders, the impossibility of comprehending the Gaelic which they spoke, the appearance of the bare-footed Highland lassies, and their odd demeanour when any attempt was made to extract informa-

tion from them, produced great amusement among the merry crew who awakened the echo of the rocks and ravines to sounds that were new in that lonely island.

At first the intention was to live chiefly on board the yacht, and only go on shore for sport and exercise; but, by degrees, discomforts arose out of this arrangement, and they determined to try to find lodgings among the inhabitants. There were one or two comparatively well to do farmers who consented to take them in, and with them they lived a harmless, happy, healthy life, varied by occasional cruises to other and yet ruder islands. The open liberality and free, frank manners of the young Englishmen soon reconciled the inhabitants to those whom, at first, they had been disposed to regard with doubt and suspi-

cion. A Scotchman is a fast friend when made, but far too canny not to hold back till he is sure that his confidence will not be misplaced. They made but few acquaintances on the mainland, and were content to take a share in the amusements of the islanders. They would dance reels with the young daughters of the farmers with whom they lodged, seldom comprehending their dialect, but still, with the light-hearted freemasonry of youth, making companionship with them, deriving amusement equally from the highland lads and lassies, and the wild sea-birds that built in the lofty crags that overhung the shore. They would often spend the Summer nights upon the sea, and assist in the fishing, upon which the inhabitants chiefly subsisted.

The only family with whom they became at all intimate was that of a Highland chief, residing in a fine old castle on the mainland—McCullam of McCullam, the head of his clan, and living more like a despotic monarch in that small island kingdom than any ordinary English landlord. He was a warm-hearted, hot-tempered old man, living alone with one daughter, upon whose brow an early disappointment had left its traces. She had never been able to boast of beauty, but there was an indescribable charm about her which few could resist who came to know her well, and they who were foremost to pass upon her the verdict that she was plain soon tempered it by admitting that there was something irresistible in

her smile and in the lighting up of her features.

One day, as they were returning from a visit to the castle, they proposed to make a *détour*, and to cruise round an island upon which they had never yet landed. Unfortunately, the sailors that belonged to the yacht had been left on shore, as they imagined themselves, with the headstrong ignorance of youth, perfectly competent to manage her. In an ordinary case they might have been so, but, unfortunately, they were overtaken by one of the sudden Summer storms so peculiar to that district. They were quite ignorant of the coast, and knew nothing of the rocks that lined the shore. Very soon the wind increased in fury, till the yacht be-

came in their hands quite unmanageable. The gloomy and angry appearance of the sky, the fierce gusts of wind that swept along the shore, till the sea was lashed into an angry mass of foam, struck dismay into the hearts of the young and inexperienced sailors. They knew that help from the mainland was impossible. Their one endeavour was to keep the boat out at sea. She weathered breaker after breaker, though dancing like a toy on the top of the waves ; then came a sheet of blinding spray, and a tremendous sea seemed to overwhelm her ; then a momentary lull, but in that short moment the boat had struck on a rock, and was fast filling, and of those young light hearts who had sailed so gaily and thoughtlessly from their island home a few hours before, "youth

at the prow, and pleasure at the helm," only two were brought home; the other four had found an early grave in the deep sea.

The two that were saved by the boat which put off as soon as the yacht struck—for the laird had seen the catastrophe from the windows—were Arthur Leslie and Stephen Douglas, who had clung to the rock till, sinking with fatigue and exhaustion, they were picked up by the boatmen more dead than alive.

"Four of the puir laddies gone down into the sa'at sea, and the other twa had been picked up, and were lying at Donald Macpherson's. They could not get round the island. Would not his honour come and see what could be done for them, or they would die too?"

Such was the boatmen's information to the laird, who anxiously awaited their return. The old man set off instantly, and found the two youths in a state bordering on distraction. They were dressed in the fishermen's clothes, and were imploring the men to go to the wreck and see if there was no hope of saving their companions.

"'Tis no good—no good at all—to throw away more life," he said, laying his hand on Arthur Leslie to detain him from making any rash endeavour to put out to sea. "But it is an awful thing—a most terrible thing!" and the tears stood in the old man's eyes as he saw the agony depicted in the countenances of the two survivors.

The storm did not abate for some hours,

and, distracted by grief, and prostrate from the shock, the two young men allowed the laird to take them home, and consign them to the care of his daughter.

After a few days Stephen Douglas, who seemed to recover from the accident more quickly than his friend, proposed that they should return to England. The sight of that wild coast and rocky shore began to be hateful to them, and, though the bodies of their companions had never been recovered, they wished to see the friends and relations of those who had met with such a premature death, to whom the smallest details of their loved and lost ones would be precious.

Arthur Leslie agreed, but when the day fixed for their departure had arrived, it was found that his delicate constitution

had not been proof against the shock and long exposure to wet, and he was soon obliged to take to his bed, helpless and crippled by a severe attack of rheumatic fever. Then Janet Stuart's capabilities and kind-heartedness shone forth, and she devoted herself day and night to the care of the sick youth with great skill and tenderness. It was many weeks before Arthur Leslie could move, and Stephen Douglas at last consented to leave him, and to return to England alone—for Leslie still continued in a depressed and hopeless state of mind, accompanied by great physical weakness. He lingered on, clinging to the friends who had shown him such kindness, and began to look upon the old castle as a second home—his only near relatives being an uncle—an old man,

quite unable to travel—and a younger brother, who was with his regiment in India. At last, when the snow was on the ground, and the Winter at its coldest, he received news that made it necessary for him to go to his uncle at once. He found the old man sinking fast, but he was in time to see him alive, and to learn positively what he had always supposed—that he was his sole heir.

The loneliness and desolation of Carrisbridge—an old house but little cared for—had so great an effect upon his still delicate health and depressed spirits, that he turned with kindly thoughts to the friends who had sheltered him in his hour of need, and after a few weeks he returned to Scotland, and, notwithstanding the disparity of their age, he proposed to Janet to

return with him to England, and to share his life and home. He had learned to depend upon her, and a sense of gratitude to her for all she had done influenced him in his decision.

Janet had grown attached to him as he recovered, under her watchful care, and the grave and careworn expression of her face had worn off in the new interest that had been awakened in her life; so that when she knew that he loved her, and would not listen to her only objection—that she was too old for him—she gave herself up thankfully to the lot that was in store for her.

The old laird demurred, at first, to his daughter's marriage, which was a thing that had never occurred to him as probable. But his objections were soon over-ruled,

and in the early Spring, Arthur Leslie brought his Scotch wife home to Carris-bridge. It was a picturesque old house, built of grey stone. Its many gables were covered with stone tiling, according to the fashion of the houses in that country, which the lapse of years had coated over with a rich yellow lichen, contrasting well with the brown moorland that surrounded it. The house was sheltered by a few trees, but it was very evident, from the trees themselves, and from the small plantations here and there, which had for years been struggling against the cruel and cutting winds that swept over the fells, that nature had resented the attempts that had been made to turn the moorland into a forest.

The large tract of brown moor and moss

which stretched for miles on every side of the house was unspeakably dreary.

Janet Leslie loved her young husband with her whole being. He was her one thought, and when her three children—two boys and a girl—were born, her happiness was complete. The two eldest died in infancy, and Stuart was the only child left to console her in her widowhood. Arthur Leslie, as we have said, died when his son was still quite young, and in her son the mother found her only consolation for the losses she had sustained. But as time advanced, and he grew up, the loneliness of his home oppressed him more and more, for though his mother loved it from association, and some who had grown up in that barren country found beauty in the bleak expanse over which the fleeting

clouds cast rapid shadows, and in the golden lights, and the brown and purple tints which changed from hour to hour, and formed wonderful and striking contrasts—yet those who cared for woodland scenery, soft meadows, or hills and valleys intersected by broad rivers, or small, babbling brooks, could not look upon it without shivering, or without an intense sense of depression.

The house stood alone, the village and the church were at some little distance, and travellers, as they passed, wondered why anyone ever selected so desolate a spot for habitation. Mrs. Leslie, however, seldom, if ever, left it, and resented Stuart's want of appreciation of his home. She forgot that the very things which made it in unison with her heart must oppress a

younger, happier mind, and when he proposed to sell the place, her indignant remonstrances prevented his ever recurring to it again.

Increasing age and consequent infirmities made her cling with greater tenacity to the house which had been hallowed by her husband's love, and, as her disinclination for society became stronger, Stuart Leslie's dislike to Carrisbridge became more decided, for though he had been accustomed to show the greatest deference to his mother's wishes, he could not conceal, even from her, that he was glad to escape to some more congenial atmosphere, where he could meet with those of his own age and pursuits. He always felt some compunction on his return home, and, whether his mother's reproaches were silent or

expressed, his sensations were always, more or less, those of a boy in disgrace. Still he could not remain much longer at Hurst Manor, and resolved, the very next day, to tell his mother that she might expect him the following week.

CHAPTER VI.

IN accordance with his determination, Mr. Leslie resolved to announce his intention of leaving Hurst Manor the next morning at breakfast. He did not dare trust himself to tell Maud alone; he dreaded a remonstrance which he knew would make him waver, even at the last moment; he must pledge himself to go, or his resolution would certainly fail. He began to feel strongly that he was bound in honour either to leave her, or speak to her of his love. He shrank from doing this. He wished to be very sure that her feelings towards him were not merely those of an

affectionate child for a man so much older than herself. Stuart Leslie was not in the least vain, and it came to him, almost as a matter of course, to doubt the possibility of being loved by a young and beautiful girl. Had not Miss Carysfort told him that Maud would probably, in compliance with the desire of her parents, marry Lord St. Leger, and that she had not sufficient character either to oppose their wishes or act for herself in contradistinction to them. Though he had told himself this again and again, yet he did not believe it ; still as long as there was uncertainty there was hope. Certainty might bring despair, for life was nothing to him now unless he could have Maud Hasseldine for his wife.

“I suppose you are going to read to me this morning, Mr. Leslie ; when is it to

be?" asked Maud, looking in at the drawing-room window as she passed with a basket full of roses in her hand. She had become quite at her ease with him now, and took for granted that he would always do her bidding.

"Saucy child," said her father, putting down the paper he was reading, and walking to the window, "as if Mr. Leslie had nothing to do but to amuse you!"

"It must be the best possible thing for him to do, papa," returned Maud gaily. "It answers two ends—pleases me, and gives him occupation."

"I can read whenever you like, Miss Hasseldine—for we must make the most of our remaining two mornings to finish Mrs. Browning," he said, with his peculiar, grave, sad smile.

Maud's heart stopped beating. She felt that she was turning pale, and stooped over her roses without trusting herself to reply. She had not realised the time when Stuart Leslie would leave her, and her life become outwardly what it was before she knew him. Happily her father came to her aid.

"I hope you are not thinking of leaving us," he began warmly, when a warning glance from his wife made him stumble over the remainder of his sentence, and mutter something about the dulness of the country at this season.

"I am afraid that I must; indeed, I feel quite ashamed when I think how long I have already trespassed upon your hospitality. I have written to my mother to tell her that I shall be at home on Thursday."

Maud, who was still standing at the window, now turned to Mr. Leslie, and said quietly—

“I am going to take my work into the summer-house in the upper garden. There is shade there now. But pray do not come, if you have other things to do.”

“I shall certainly come,” he replied, looking at her reproachfully. “I will fetch the books at once. I believe they were left in the library.”

Mr. Leslie went out of the room, and Mr. and Mrs. Hasseldine remained alone.

“I cannot imagine how you could be so provoking, Mr. Hasseldine,” said his wife, as soon as Mr. Leslie had closed the door, “as to force that man to stay, when for days, I might almost say weeks past, I have been wishing him well away.”

“Why? He is a very agreeable man. You wished me to invite him, and you have always seemed to like him.”

“I wished you to ask him! Why, I never knew of his existence till you begged me to ask him to dinner. But you always put everything on me, Mr. Hasseldine.”

“There is nothing to put,” returned her husband. “Why have you suddenly taken a dislike to him?”

“Liking or disliking has nothing in the world to do with it,” retorted his wife. “He has done enough since he has been here, or I cannot see out of my eyes. Even before he came, Maud behaved in the most absurd and extraordinary manner. I hoped, at first that he would take to Helen Carysfort. She was ready enough to jump down his throat—but not a bit of

it ; and now the mischief is done, neither you nor I can undo it."

"Undo what?" asked Mr. Hasseldine, wiping his forehead, and looking completely puzzled. "I do not know what you wish to be undone, my dear," he added meekly—for he was decidedly afraid of his fine-lady wife.

"Why, have not you prevented the possibility of Maud's marrying Lord St. Leger? That is what is done, and will never be undone, I prophesy," she said triumphantly.

"But I had no notion there was any question of such a thing. In fact, I did not know that Maud and St. Leger had ever met," he replied, in considerable astonishment.

"Of course they have not met, and

whose fault was that? When I sent out the invitations for our dinner-party—at your own especial request remember, Mr. Hasseldine—you never took the trouble to inform me of Lord St. Leger's proper address and title, so, of course, his younger brother came in his stead."

"Well, for the life of me," exclaimed Mr. Hasseldine, "I cannot see the wonderful amount of mischief that poor Leslie has done, for you can hardly accuse him of preventing Maud's marrying a man she has never seen; and I do not believe he has ever thought of her for himself—he is so much older, and looks upon her as a child; otherwise, I declare that I cannot see why he should not be as good a husband for her as anyone else."

"You would as soon see your daughter

simple Mrs. Leslie as Countess of Conyers ? I believe it, Mr. Hasseldine—I believe it entirely. Money is all you care about ; you do not care for birth and aristocratic connection. I always heard that was the way of people in trade, though it has not been my fate to meet with it till now.”

This last taunt was too much even for Mr. Hasseldine’s temper, and, with a muttered imprecation upon fine-lady airs, he stalked out of the room, banging the door with a violence that shook the whole house, and had anything but a soothing effect upon his wife’s nerves. He was a kind-hearted man, and tolerably easy when not too much provoked by his wife, but, as she often said with a heartfelt sigh, “totally devoid of ambition or any aristocratic tendencies.”

The one desire of Mrs. Hasseldine's heart was to see her daughter Countess of Conyers, but as yet the intimacy between the two families had not progressed as she had hoped and expected it would have done, and she saw, with a woman's quickness, how great a hold Mr. Leslie had acquired over Maud, and how completely her short intercourse with him had changed her from a child into a woman. However, thank goodness, he was going at last, and it would be no fault of hers if he ever received another invitation. Once gone, Maud would forget him sooner or later—in fact, she must do so.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hasseldine's plans were not being furthered in the summer-house in the upper garden, though Stuart Leslie had determined not to betray his love, or

attempt in any way to win her young heart, till he had told his mother of his intentions, and received Mr. Hasseldine's permission to woo and win her. But though he prided himself upon being both chivalrous and high-minded in this resolve, it was, in fact, a kind of specious sophistry, for had he not been wooing and winning her all this time? At all events, he would keep a strict guard over himself during the remainder of his stay, and the change in Maud's manner, from frank and childlike gaiety to quietness and reserve, made this more easy.

"I hope you have not come to read to me, if it is in the least inconvenient to you, Mr. Leslie," said Maud, as he came into the summer-house with two books in his hand.

She spoke with an assumption of dignity that, if Stuart Leslie's heart had been less sad, would have provoked a smile.

"Certainly not. Why should it be inconvenient to me to do what gives me so much pleasure? You said yourself just now that it was the best possible thing for me to do."

"Yes; but then I did not know—I never had any idea that you were going away. You never told *me* so," she said, rather illogically.

"I told you as soon as I told anyone else; indeed, as soon as I knew it myself. I could not settle my plans till to-day. But what shall I read to you?" he continued, turning over the leaves of the book, and shrinking from any discussion on the subject of his departure. "Do you know

‘Lady Geraldine’s Courtship?’ It is rather a strange poem, but with considerable beauty in it. Two stanzas I like especially. In fact, they always remind me of you!”

“Of me? Pray read it then,” she said eagerly, relapsing into her natural manner, “and tell me which they are.”

Mr. Leslie began to read till he came to the following lines.

“I mean these,” he said :

“‘And she spake such good thoughts natural, as if she
ever thought them,

And had sympathies so ready, open, free as bird on
branch,

Just as ready to fly east and west, whichever way
besought them;

In the birchen wood a chirrup, or a cockcrow in the
grange.

'In her utmost lightness there is truth, and often she
speaks lightly,
And she has a grace in being young, which mourners
even approve,
For the root of some grave, earnest thought is under-
struck so lightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers
above.'

But perhaps I ought to say that you have
often reminded me of them, as I made
their acquaintance long before I made
yours."

"I suppose I ought to be very much
flattered at your thinking such a descrip-
tion like me. Only if you knew me better,
perhaps you would not think so."

"It is the description of a very healthy,
happy state of mind, and I consider that I
know you as well as one human being can
know another. I only hope that when I

next see you I may find you quite unchanged."

"Of course I shall be unchanged. What should change me?"

"The changes and chances of this mortal life—especially one very common one—marriage, for instance."

"But I am not the least likely to marry."

"Yet your friend, Miss Carysfort, tells me that she feels sure that your destiny is to marry Lord St. Leger, and become the mistress of Conyers Abbey."

"How absurd, when I do not even know Lord St. Leger!" she said indignantly, with rising colour in her cheeks. "Did you believe her, Mr. Leslie?"

"I think not. Not at present, at all events."

Maud was silent. She could not trust herself to speak. She felt, with a feeling of acute pain, how calmly he viewed her probable union for life with another. He had no wish that their paths in life should run side by side. How glad she was to know this now—now, before she had ever betrayed how much he was to her. She would never let him know it; but still she wished that he would speak to her of his home, and of his past life. Why did he never talk to her of himself?

Mr. Leslie said that he had better finish the poem he was reading, and till he had done so Maud had no opportunity of speaking to him. When he closed the book he said that he thought it would be better to leave it with her, as there were still many poems which he had not read, and, "I can

also bring you some books that I think you would care for, when I come again. Shall I do so?"

"I should like it very much. You are going to your own place, then, Mr. Leslie?"

"Yes; my mother has been alone now for some months, and is very anxious for my return."

"It is in the north, I think?"

"Yes; Carrisbridge in Cumberland."

"Is it a pretty place?"

"Rather a picturesque old house, but in a most dreary country—the blackest part of the Cumberland Fells. There is nothing for miles but a track of brown moorland that you would consider the acmé of desolation."

"Does Mrs. Leslie like living there? Is she very old? Does she live alone?"

“Which question am I to answer first?” he asked, smiling. “My mother lives alone, with the exception of an old Miss Campbell—half friend and half companion, as stiff and antiquated as the house itself. My mother is old, but wonderfully active notwithstanding, and she loves the place from old association, and because she spent her early married life there with my father, whom she loved as she has never loved anyone since, and never will.”

“Except yourself, I suppose.”

He shook his head.

“She never loved me as she did my father. She thinks, too, that I lead rather a useless and indolent life, and have no strong local attachments as she has.”

“Have you any friends in the neighbourhood?”

"There is not a house near us—not a neighbour to visit for miles, and as to friends," he added, gloomily, "as yet it has never been my good fortune to meet with any."

Maud gave him a look of reproach, and the tears sprang to her eyes as she replied,

"I am sorry you think so. I should have imagined that we might have been considered as such."

"It was both an ungrateful and ungracious speech, I grant," he said, quickly. "I may truly say, however, that all my interests in life are divided between Hurst Manor and Carrisbridge."

Maud blushed, saying softly, with down-cast eyes,

"Then you will come again?"

How strong was the temptation to take

his darling in his arms, and tell her that he desired nothing so much as never to be parted from her again, and to hear from her own lips that his love was returned. But he controlled himself, and, with strong determination, mastered every appearance of emotion; and, though his cheek was deadly pale, and his heart beating almost to suffocation, he replied calmly,

“Certainly—I hope so, if you will give me a general invitation.”

CHAPTER VII.

TWO days after, Stuart Leslie was on his way home. It was late before he arrived, and afternoon was fading into evening on a glorious August day. It had been a day of golden sunlight, such as is often seen in Italy, but rarely in England—warm, glowing, and brilliant, as if the very air was impregnated by gold dust from the rays of the sun. There was yet a flood of light over the brown moorland, and every pasture-field and tract of purple heather was glowing with a beauty of its own in the warm Summer air.

Stuart Leslie leant back in the carriage

that had been sent to the somewhat distant station to meet him, and looked out on the surrounding country with a glad feeling that it looked less dreary than he expected, and wishing that he could see it now for the first time, and so imagine how it would appear to Maud Hasseldine, for she was his one thought. She had been present to his mind the whole day, and he had no dream of any future in which she was not the predominant idea. His love for her pervaded his whole being; the atmosphere of her presence still hung around him.

As he drove up, the old house looked almost gay as the sun lighted up its windows, shone on its grey gables, and on the flower-garden below. It was a quaint, old-fashioned garden, full of flowers, for the garden was one of the very few things

in which Mr. Leslie had always taken a pride and pleasure.

The door was quickly opened by a servant who had grown grey in the service of the Leslies, and Stuart's old dog came joyfully down the steps, wagging his tail, to meet him. His heart, softened as it was by the great love that filled it, opened readily to all genial influences, and he felt that there was gladness and rest in his home-greeting, and in the consciousness that still for him there were eyes

“To mark his coming, and look brighter when he came.”

“Well, Lee,” he said, giving his hand to the old servant, and stooping down to caress the dog, “how is my mother? You are as young as ever, I see.”

“Mrs. Leslie is pretty well, Mr. Stuart,

considering. It will give her new life to see you again, such a stranger as you have been of late."

As he spoke, Mrs. Leslie's tall, upright figure appeared, slowly descending the old oak staircase. Stuart advanced quickly to meet her.

"You are welcome home at last, my son," she said, kissing his brow, and leaning upon him as she crossed the hall, for, though upright and apparently strong, she walked slowly, and with a stick.

"Shall I come up to your room, mother?" he asked. "Do not come down for me."

"I would rather come down; we shall be better there. Abigail is upstairs."

"Ah, to be sure; I forgot her. How is the old lady, mother?"

"Getting deaf, which tires me sadly. But now tell me of yourself, Stuart. You are looking well. What has kept you abroad so long?" Everything out of the north was "abroad" to Mrs. Leslie.

"The publishers and booksellers, in the first instance, mother; then endless engagements in London I could not escape from, and since then I have been paying some visits in the country."

"Needless, very needless, I think. If you wished to be in the country, where could you be so well as here, at Carrisbridge." Mrs. Leslie still retained her strong Scotch accent.

"I did not go exactly for country air," he replied, feeling impatient at his mother's somewhat captious manner. "I wanted some fishing, in the first place, and

after that I met with friends who pressed me to stay with them. But, at all events, I am here now, mother."

"I hope that now you intend to stay, Stuart. There are several things I wish you to attend to. You look well, very well," repeated his mother, scanning him curiously, as if some way she thought him changed. "But now we had better dine—dinner was put off till you came."

"I am sorry for that, mother. I shall be ready immediately—pray don't wait."

The dinner seemed to Stuart Leslie long and tedious to the last degree. He found it very difficult to pay due attention to all the small uninteresting events and details of the place which his mother doled out to him, or to listen to the chatter and answer the inquisitive questions of old Abigail Campbell,

who, from boyhood, had been his pet aversion. He longed to be alone—alone with his own thoughts, his glad on-lookings, and tender memories. As soon as the dull evening was over, and he had taken his mother upstairs, he opened the window and walked up and down, watching the myriads of stars light up the purple sky, and the fantastic shadows the moon cast upon the old house. These quiet influences were very soothing to his perturbed and restless spirit, and when at last he went to bed, it was with a firm determination that nothing should prevent his telling his mother of his attachment the very next day.

As soon as breakfast was over, Mrs. Leslie asked her son to go out with her, that she might show him various improvements,

and ask his opinion about them. She walked very slowly, standing still continually to talk to the gardeners and labourers, and then to the bailiff, who followed her round the farm, and who was a new importation, and evidently very anxious to impress his own views upon Mr. Leslie, in contradistinction to those of his mother, which, as Stuart had no views at all as to the planting of crops, he felt to be intolerably tiresome. He endeavoured, however, to assume an appearance of interest, while, in reality, he was counting the minutes till he could claim his mother's attention to his own concerns, anxious, meanwhile, to propitiate her as much as possible. At last they turned into the garden-gate, and Mrs. Leslie sat down wearily upon a bench that was near.

“You are tired, mother, with walking so much. You should have a donkey-chair just to take you round the place. I saw several both at Brighton and St. Leonards. I think I must send for one.”

“No, thank you, Stuart. I should not like the trouble of driving a donkey—stupid, obstinate creatures they are!—or to feel that I was using a fellow-creature to drag me about. I daresay it may come to that in time, but as yet I can trust to my own feet. But now let me hear what you have to say, for I am sure there is something to be told,” she continued, in answer to her son’s look of surprise; “for though you have been doing your best to attend to what I was telling you about enclosing a part of the common, you were thinking your own thoughts all the time.

Indeed, I believe the place might be sunk in the sea for all you care. In fact, you never liked it," she said, striking her stick repeatedly upon the ground, which, with her, was always a sign of great irritation.

This was not a promising beginning, and Stuart, thinking it would be better to defer his communication, recurred to some question which had been discussed, and left unsettled, as to the land belonging to the farm.

"It is no good to be pretending an interest you don't feel just to please me, Stuart," she said, in a tone of annoyance. "Let me know what is in your mind, and then, perhaps, you may be able to attend properly to business."

"Why cannot I do so now, mother?" he

asked, rather provoked at being treated like a child.

“Because some change has come over you since you left this place—you cannot deceive me—and it would be better that I should know what it is.”

Stuart Leslie did not reply for some minutes, and then said—

“Mother, you have always wanted me to marry, but it never came to me as a possibility. Now I have seen one who, if I could persuade her to share my life, would make it happier than I could ever have expected ; but I could not speak till I had told you of my intention.”

“Who can it be, that you should wait for your old mother’s leave to speak?” she asked quickly, though evidently gratified

at her son's consideration. "Is she young or old, rich or poor?"

"Her father is rich, and she is the only child. I suppose she will be so eventually. She is very young, and very lovely, mother. If you could only see Maud Hasseldine, you would not wonder that I should wish to make her my wife."

"Hasseldine—Hasseldine; I know no family that bears that name, and yet I fancy that it is not altogether new to me."

"Mr. Hasseldine is the banker in Liverpool that I went to long ago about the bonds that my grandfather left you."

"Oh! a business man. It takes time and two generations to rub off that rust. And what does the young lady say?"

"I told you, mother, that I wouldn't

“speak till I had seen you; but I don’t believe that she would refuse me.”

“I suppose not. Well, I am glad that you have given me time to look about for a place where I can end my days.”

“What do you mean, mother? Of course this is your home, and always must be.”

“No, I think not; and two old women, for I suppose Abigail Campbell will never leave me now, are poor company for such young flighty things as girls are now-a-days. Besides, two mistresses in the same house never answer.”

“But, my dear mother,” said Stuart, greatly distressed, “I have always looked upon this house as yours, and such an idea as your leaving it never crossed my mind. Maud is quite a child—a gentle, loving

child. When you have once seen her, you would never think of leaving Carrisbridge. In fact, it is not to be thought of for a moment. I would sooner live abroad, or indeed anywhere, than turn you out of your home."

"It is all right," said Mrs. Leslie, "quite right for 'the old to give way to the young,' but, as you say, there is no immediate hurry till you have ascertained the young lady's feelings upon the matter. Must you go away at once?" she asked, rather sadly.

"No, certainly not. I shall be guided entirely by what you wish," replied Stuart, thankful not to have met with more opposition. He could not bear the idea of his mother being uprooted in her old age from the house which was so dear to her, and which

was, in a great measure, her own creation. He had never contemplated anything of the kind, and, for the first time, began to wonder how his mother and Maud would agree, in the event of her consenting to be his wife. He thought that he knew Maud thoroughly, but the fact was that she had a strong will, and a fund of perversity of which he had only very faint glimmerings.

He took his mother into the house that she might rest from her walk, and then, crossing the hall, went along a short corridor that led to his own rooms—a bedroom and sitting-room. As this passage did not lead to any other part of the house, he was rather surprised to find the old servant waiting outside his door.

“Do you want me, Lee?” he asked, ob-

serving a hesitation in the man's manner that was very unusual in him.

"Yes, sir, for one moment, if you please. I wanted to tell you that I put some letters that came for you in your absence in the old bureau, and the key is in that drawer."

"Letters for me!—then why were they not forwarded?" asked Mr. Leslie quickly.

"Well, sir, I did not know what to do. They were not like your other letters, and if you remember, Mr. Stuart, there were some letters that I used to put on one side that came to you in times gone by; so I thought I had better do the same now, and not give them to my mistress to forward."

Stuart Leslie changed colour, and hastily unlocking the *escritoire*, took out some foreign-looking letters. He stood still,

contemplating the address, as people invariably do, when they could at once relieve any perplexity they may feel as to their correspondent by opening the letter.

“I only wanted to know if I did right, sir.”

“Yes, quite right, Lee—quite right. I am much obliged to you;” but he looked agitated, and the old man quickly withdrew without any further remark.

Stuart Leslie remained in his room the rest of the morning, and in the afternoon he told his mother that he must ride to —, the nearest town, as he had been writing several letters on business, and wished to post them himself.

“Really business letters, Stuart?” asked his mother. “Remember that I should

like to be told when your other communication is made."

"These are only business letters, mother; and as to what you refer to, I think that will be best done in person," said Stuart, who looked jaded and weary. "It is cooler now, and I should like a ride to blow the cobwebs out of my brain."

"How very different Stuart looks from what he did yesterday!" said Mrs. Leslie to her companion. "He has got his old anxious face. It is very strange that one day here should do this. I never was sure that Carrisbridge agreed with him."

"It is not that," replied Miss Campbell, emphatically. "Mr. Stuart may not like it, but I believe it to be the finest air in the world."

CHAPTER VIII.

STUART LESLIE did not regain his bright looks, and his mother began to wish for his marriage to be settled, and often pressed him upon the subject; but, to her surprise, he did not seem in any hurry to bring his happiness to a consummation; and yet the days passed heavily to him—more heavily, perhaps, though possibly with less acute suffering than they did to Maud Hasseldine at Hurst Manor. To her it came as a first grief, and she felt as if a black curtain had been suddenly dropped down before her eyes,

shutting out all hope and interest from her life.

“If I could only have seen him once again,” she thought, “to know when he was coming back !”

But the fates had been unpropitious in furthering Maud's wishes, for on the last day of his visit Mr. Hasseldine had asked Mr. Leslie to ride over to Conyers Abbey ; and when, in the evening, she heard her father order the dog-cart to be at the door at seven to take Mr. Leslie to the station, then she knew that she should not see him again alone, and that the hope she had clung to of a few last words must be abandoned.

“I suppose I must say good-bye as well as good night,” she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, as he gave her a candle that evening.

"I am afraid so. I cannot hope to see anyone so early."

"I am always up early," Maud began, when Mrs. Hasseldine interrupted.

"I have ordered breakfast to be taken up to your room, Mr. Leslie, in the morning; it will save time if you are at all late."

Then Maud knew that the idea that had flashed through her brain, of getting up early and making his breakfast, was a thing not to be thought of, and a long hand pressure and a murmured "God bless you," was all she had to live upon till—till when?—for years, perhaps for ever, thought the poor child, as she cried herself to sleep. She would not for the world that her mother should know that she was unhappy; but alone, and at night, she

might have the luxury of bewailing her own wretchedness.

She watched the carriage drive away the next morning, with a feeling of desolation that it was almost impossible to struggle against. For days she lived in the past; she read again the same books he had read to her; she sat in the same Summer-house, trying to imagine that he was still there.

If Mrs. Hasseldine observed Maud's dreamy state she did not comment upon it, but trusted to time to efface Stuart Leslie's memory.

At first Maud lived on from day to day in the hope that he would write to her—perhaps telling her of his love—for of that she felt no doubt, or a formal letter to her father to the same purport, or even

a common-place letter speaking of his arrival at home, &c. But no, it was as if he were swept out of her life, and her mother's continual remark that it was strange Mr. Leslie could not write a word after being so long a visitor in the house, at last found a ready echo in her heart. After a time sorrow gave place to some degree of anger, and with that an increasing interest in the world around her, so that when, some time after, her mother brought her an invitation to an archery meeting at Conyers Abbey, she was glad of some change, and gave sufficient attention to the details of her dress to justify Mrs. Hasseldine in a reasonable hope that the impression that Mr. Leslie had made on her mind was already fading away.

A fête out of doors was so perfectly new

to Maud that she could not help both speculating upon it and looking forward to it, though she felt rather humiliated at being able to do so, and tried to persuade herself that her interest was mainly owing to the chance of receiving some intelligence of Stuart Leslie. Her mother was so delighted to see her take any trouble about her dress that no expense was spared to make it as *recherché* and becoming as possible, and it certainly did both Maud and the milliner great credit, for nothing could be more brilliant or fairy-like than her appearance as she got into the carriage to drive to the Abbey. She looked very pretty and animated, and was evidently much amused by the gay scene which burst upon her as they drove up to the door. The crowd of people assembled in the Park, the gay dresses,

the spirited music of the band, the tents that were scattered about the grounds, all gave the place a festive appearance which delighted her.

They were received by Lady Conyers with great cordiality, and she immediately introduced Maud to Lord St. Leger, who was by her side. There were also several ladies and gentlemen dressed in uniform, standing together, with bows in their hands.

"Do you shoot, Miss Hasseldine?" asked Lord St. Leger, giving her his arm. "If not, perhaps you would like to find a seat in the shade, where you could see the shooting well."

"I never tried. I wish I did. It must be very pleasant," she said, looking at the

groups of archers collecting round the targets.

"Perhaps you would like to see the prizes, before we leave the house?" said Lord St. Leger, opening a door into the conservatory, which led into the drawing-room, where a knot of people were collected round a table, on which were several attractive-looking jewel-cases.

"Are these beautiful things given to those who shoot best?" asked Maud, in a tone of surprise. "It seems to me they are most fortunate people to have a double pleasure."

"How so?" asked Lord St. Leger, looking amused at her eager expression of admiration and delight.

"They have *first* the amusement of shooting, and *then* the pleasure of victory."

Maud suddenly remembered the question Mr. Leslie had asked her about her ultimate destination, and blushed deeply at the recollection. She suddenly became shy and silent, to the surprise of her companion, who would not have been flattered had he known the comparison that was going on in her mind between him and Stuart Leslie, considerably to his disadvantage.

Maud, remembering that this was probably the only opportunity she would have of hearing of Mr. Leslie, was determined to make some inquiry, and said suddenly, without well knowing how to introduce the subject,

“Mr. Stuart Leslie says, in one of his poems, that people require much more excitement now than they did formerly.”

"Does he? I forget. Perhaps it is true. Not that I am well up in his works, though he is a great friend of mine. By-the-by, he stayed with you for some time after he left us. I hope you liked him?"

"We have never heard from him since he left us, Lord St. Leger. Have you?"

"Not that I remember. He is seldom to be seen or heard of except in the Spring. He lives shut up in some old castle in the north of England, alone with his mother, I believe. When the Winter is over he comes out of his shell like a butterfly. He is very agreeable—at least, he can be, when he has not a silent fit upon him."

Maud, who was feeling very indignant during this speech, at hearing Mr. Leslie so coolly discussed, said drily,

"I never observed that he was especially silent."

"Probably not with you," said Lord St. Leger, smiling. "It was scarcely likely that he would be. But they are beginning to shoot, I see, so I had better secure you a seat." And fetching a chair out of one of the tents, he placed it for her, and stood by, answering her eager questions, amused at the fresh and genuine interest she took in all that was going on around her, especially whenever an arrow pierced the bull's eye, and the bugle gave public notice of the successful hit.

Presently Mrs. Hasseldine, who did not wish Lord St. Leger's attentions to Maud to become the subject of observation, came up and carried her off to introduce her to some friend of her own whom she had met

quite unexpectedly. While they were talking, Lady Conyers came up to them.

"I was looking for you, Mrs. Hasseldine, to beg that you will not think of running off before the dancing begins. The young folks are never satisfied without a dance after dinner, and we always keep the band for it."

"Thank you, dear Lady Conyers, you are very good, but Maud's dress is scarcely fit for dancing."

"Indeed it is; in fact, she would look lovely in anything," said Lady Conyers, in a low voice. "Everyone is admiring her. As to her dress, all keep on their morning dress. They only take off hats and bonnets—just arranging their hair a little. We dance in the house, for the evenings often turn cold, which does not suit the *chaperons*,

if it does the young ladies, and they now think the house more comfortable for dancing. You would like to stay, my dear, would not you?" she said, turning to Maud.

"Yes, very much, if papa would not mind."

"We can soon settle that," said Lady Conyers, laughing. "If papa chooses to be unsociable, we must send him home by himself, for we certainly cannot spare you."

This was soon arranged, and Maud gave herself up to the full enjoyment of her first ball. She danced every dance, and Lord St. Leger, who was continually hovering round her, was most devoted in his attentions. When she laid her head upon her pillow that night, wearied out, yet still restless from excitement, she could scarce-

ly believe that so few hours had elapsed since she left her room that morning. She certainly felt like a totally different person.

The next day was one of weariness and dissatisfaction with herself to find that one day of gaiety should have had so much effect upon her. She almost resolved not to expose herself to a similar temptation, not knowing, poor child, that it was only the variety that excited her, and that pleasure repeated would very soon pall.

Two days later Lord St. Leger rode over with a pressing invitation from his mother to spend a few days at Conyers Abbey. Mrs. Hasseldine accepted readily, and, after he was gone, descanted, in a flutter of delight, upon Lord St. Leger's various merits.

"You must agree with me, Maud," she said at last, provoked by Maud's continued silence. "I don't think I ever saw so agreeable a young man, and he was so especially attentive to you."

"He was very good-natured—I suppose people always are so in their own houses—besides, I daresay he thought I should not know anyone."

"It is very strange that you do not seem half to appreciate him, Maud. Such a contrast to that grave, silent Mr. Leslie that you always seemed to think so much of!"

This was a false move on Mrs. Hasseldine's part, and she repented as soon as she had made the remark, and saw how indignantly Maud's eyes flashed at her words.

"Perhaps not; they are not much alike,"

she replied, with the slightest possible sarcasm in her voice, so slight that her mother did not detect it.

Mrs. Hasseldine, hoping that no harm had been done by her remark, left the room to speak to her husband, and tell him of the proposed visit to the Abbey.

Maud looked forward to it with decided pleasure, which, however, would have been completely spoiled had she known of a certain letter which Mrs. Hasseldine received a day or two after. It was from Stuart Leslie, saying that he was going up to London, and proposing to pay a short visit to Hurst Manor on his way. She did not even show this letter to her husband, but wrote a few lines to Mr. Leslie herself, saying that, as they should not be at home, they could not receive him. It

was a short, cold letter, with no message either from Maud or her husband—indeed, without any mention of their names.

“That will keep him away,” she thought triumphantly, as she folded up the letter.

“It would be too provoking to have that man turning up now, and spoiling all.”

Maud, who had no idea how dear her visit to Conyers Abbey had cost her, and who was fêted, petted, and admired to the greatest degree, enjoyed her visit extremely, and began to dread the return to her old home life.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Hasseldines had been more than a week at Conyers Abbey, and had again yielded to Lady Conyers' pressing entreaty to spare them a few days more, when Mrs. Hasseldine called her husband into her room one evening after she was dressed for dinner, to ask him if anyone was expected to arrive on that day.

"Not that I know of; Lord Conyers went over to the meeting at Skipton. He may very probably have asked some one to dinner."

"I am not speaking of anyone coming to dinner, but to stay in the house. I saw

a fly and luggage come to the door while I was dressing. It does not matter ; but I also wished to ask you if I have not proved myself right about Lord St. Leger ?”

“How right, my dear ?—right about what ?”

“About Lord St. Leger and Maud. When I spoke of it before, you treated it all as moonshine, and said that if she married Mr. Leslie it would do just as well.”

“I suppose it would, if Maud liked him as well,” said Mr. Hasseldine, walking about the room in despair at not finding his necktie and studs, evidently much more concerned at that moment at being late for dinner than interested in Maud’s future husband. “Besides,” he said, as he

thrust his arm into his coat sleeve with a sigh of relief, "as far as I remember, when you talked of it, they had never met."

"They have met now, and to some purpose; so I hope that you will believe me another time. I told you that Maud would forget Mr. Leslie in a week, and become attached to Lord St. Leger."

"But is it so? I don't believe she has done either the one or the other," said Mr. Hasseldine, able to disagree with his wife, now the important fact of being ready for dinner was a *fait accompli*.

"Why not? She never mentions Mr. Leslie's name, and is always either riding or walking with Lord St. Leger."

"So are all the rest of the ladies, as far as I can see. I don't suppose he means to marry them all."

Mr. Hasseldine had a decidedly contradictory fit upon him that day.

"There are none so blind as those that won't see. Perhaps, on the wedding-day, you will give me credit for some foresight and penetration," she replied, shrugging her shoulders rather contemptuously.

"I will cap your proverb by another, my dear. 'There is many a slip between the cup and the lip.' What do you think of that, old woman?"

"I think you are extremely vulgar to talk in that manner," she retorted angrily, walking out of the room as she spoke.

Mr. Hasseldine smiled, hummed a tune, and evidently considered that he had the best of the argument.

"A friend of yours has just arrived," said Lord St. Leger to Maud, when they

met in the drawing-room before dinner.

"I hope we shall not have to wait long, for I had no luncheon to-day, and am very hungry,"

"Of mine! Impossible! I have no friend—unless you mean Helen Carysfort. Is she here?"

"Well, if not a friend, at all events an acquaintance that you like. I never received the letter, so his arrival took me quite by surprise. But here he comes to speak for himself," he said, as Stuart Leslie entered the room.

Maud felt, for a moment, as if the room was going round. Her very lips turned white, and she caught hold of a chair to support herself. In a moment she recovered, hoping that her agitation had escaped observation. It had been noticed, how-

ever, by one person who was instantly by her side.

She knew that Stuart Leslie was holding her hand, and saying something to her ; but there was a strange noise in her head, and she felt dizzy and confused.

"I am so surprised. I did not know that you were here," she said at length.

"I am only just arrived ; but you are ill," he said, looking at her earnestly, and speaking in the calm, strong voice that always had so much influence over her.

There is nothing that thrills through the heart like the sound of a loved familiar voice. Once more to gaze on the face we have longed for, and hungered to see again, brings with it unspeakable happiness ; but it is almost more blessed to hear again the voice whose echoes have remained upon

our ears through long dreary years of silence.

Stuart Leslie had rather a remarkable voice, and it was rapture to Maud to hear it again.

"No, I am not. I was only surprised," she said, blushing deeply.

At this moment Lord St. Leger came up to take her to dinner. Mrs. Hasseldine looked extremely put out, Mr. Hasseldine rather amused, the rest profoundly indifferent. Stuart Leslie tried to secure a seat near Maud, but her mother, by a quick manoeuvre, prevented this, and it was not till late in the evening that he had any opportunity of speaking to her.

"You are not going away to-morrow?" she asked breathlessly, feeling as if her life depended upon his answer.

"Certainly not, unless I am turned out of doors, and then I must beg for shelter at Hurst Manor," he said, smiling. "When do you go home?"

"I don't know. Did you know we were here?" she said, as if his sudden appearance had struck her as very strange—"and why did you never write?"

"I knew you were here, and I always like speaking better than writing."

"Then you came——"

"Because you were here—yes."

"But how could you know it?"

"Well, perhaps I should have said 'guessed it.' When Mrs. Hasseldine told me that she could not receive me, as you were all going away, I felt sure that I should find you here."

"Mamma!" repeated Maud, looking

bewildered. "When could you have seen her?"

"I did not see her; she told me so when she wrote."

"Oh! then you have written to her?"

"Yes, when I proposed to come to Hurst Manor on my way to London. Did not you know of this?"

"No—I never heard it till this moment," replied Maud, suddenly enlightened as to her mother's tactics. "Mamma never mentioned it to me."

"I had probably exhausted her patience by the unreasonable length of my last visit. But I mean to try again," he said, with his peculiar quiet smile.

Maud was silent. She felt convinced that, as long as her mother had the smallest hope of her marrying Lord St. Leger, she

never would allow Mr. Leslie to come to Hurst Manor.

“Do you think it useless for me to propose it?” he said, rather gravely, after waiting some minutes for Maud to reply. “If you wish me not to come, I will not attempt it; otherwise——”

“As if that were the least probable!” she said reproachfully; “only everything seems so strange, I cannot understand it.”

“Why?—in what way?”

“I thought it odd that you never wrote a line to us after you left. We all thought so, and when you did, mamma never said a word about it. I don’t believe she even told papa. But Lady Conyers is going to bed—I cannot stay,” she said nervously.

"Only one minute; I want to explain my silence."

"You can tell me to-morrow. Pray don't keep me now," said Maud, hurrying away, anxious that her mother, who was in the next room, should not see her talking to Leslie. "If she does, we shall go home, and she will not let him come. If I can only see him for half an hour, just to understand why he did not write! After that, I shall not care, for I do not think that he is in the least changed," thought Maud, as she followed her mother into her room, as she did every night, to talk over the events of the day.

She would have been glad that night to have escaped this conversation, for Mrs. Hasseldine looked ominously grave, and even displeased. To prevent the possi-

bility of being found fault with, as she was sure her mother would have to find some safety-valve for her irritation, Maud suddenly resolved to take the initiative, and said,

“Mamma, why did you not say that you had heard from Mr. Stuart Leslie, when we were always wondering that he did not write?”

“Why should I?” replied her mother, looking rather confused. “Besides, I only heard from him after our visit here was arranged. He proposed to come to us, which, of course, was impossible. He is a most provoking person, always turning up when he is not wanted.”

“Perhaps Lady Conyers wants him, mamma. How can you tell?”

“That I am sure she doesn’t,” replied

Mrs. Hasseldine quickly. "It was only just now that she said to me that she was never more surprised to see anyone in all her life."

"I believe he wrote to Lord St. Leger, and the letter was lost."

"It would have been a good thing if he had been lost too. Now, Maud, do let me beg one thing—that you will not discourage Lord St. Leger by always running after Mr. Leslie, his books, his poetry, and all that nonsense."

"I don't know what you mean, mamma," said Maud indignantly, "either by my discouraging Lord St. Leger, or running after Mr. Leslie. It is quite a mistake to imagine that Lord St. Leger ever thought—ever said a word to me of the kind I suppose you mean."

"Perhaps not yet; but he probably will if you can behave sensibly."

"I am sure I hope he will not. I could never be his wife, mamma, if that is what you are thinking of."

"Never be Countess of Conyers, Maud? Never take your place with the highest titled ladies of the land? You do not know what you are saying, child! And pray why not, if I may ask?"

"First, because Lord St. Leger never asked me, and never will; next, because, though he is very civil and good-natured, I should never care enough about him to make me wish to be with him all my life."

"And you think you could spend your life with that odious Mr. Leslie, I dare say?"

"I need not think about that either, mamma, as he has never asked me. But I do wish that I could see and talk to people without being so worried about them," said Maud impatiently.

"Well, I do think you are very ungracious, Maud. I am always striving after your good, and you are not the least grateful—only perverse and contradictory."

"Then I wish you would leave my good to take care of itself, mamma, and as I don't please you, and don't want to be scolded, I had better say good night." And, without waiting for any further comments upon her behaviour, Maud walked off in a very dignified manner.

Poor Mrs. Hasseldine got very little comfort from her husband, when she poured

out her troubles to him the same night. He was very sleepy, and utterly unsympathising. "Could not think how she could worry the poor child about nothing," and assured her that "everything would come right, if she would only leave everything and everybody quite alone."

Mrs. Hasseldine at last grew quite angry, and wished she had never accepted Lady Conyers' invitation, or come to live at Hurst Manor, and, in fact, that all the circumstances of her life had been perfectly different. At all events, she was determined to return home if she saw "anything going on" between Maud and Stuart Leslie.

By a fortunate chance Maud and Mr. Leslie met on the staircase as they were going down to breakfast the next day.

"When and where can I see you?" he asked quickly, retaining her hand as he spoke.

"I don't know—nowhere, I am afraid."

"I must see you," he returned impatiently. "Will you go through the house into the conservatory after breakfast? I will come to you there."

Maud nodded assent, and they parted.

As soon as Stuart Leslie perceived that Mrs. Hasseldine evidently intended to prevent any intercourse between himself and her daughter, he at once gave up his resolution of not speaking to Maud till he had her father's permission. And now that he had seen his mother, and had made her aware of his intentions, he thought it would be eminently desirable to

ascertain Maud's feelings towards himself as soon as possible.

He found her waiting for him in the conservatory. She had gone in by the door in the house which opened at the back, and lingered behind the tubs of orange-trees and other large plants, evidently dreading to be seen. This was so unlike her that Leslie felt very indignant with those who had put this feeling into her mind.

"Have you seen all the flowers?" he said, going up to her. "All the geraniums and camellias are in the front of the house."

"I saw them yesterday," she replied, shrinking back, "and I do not wish to go in front."

"Because you do not wish to be seen? This is quite a new phase," he said with a smile, looking earnestly into her face. "Why is it?"

"I don't know," she replied shyly, "but you promised to tell me why you never wrote."

"Well, one thing rather hangs on the other. Shall we be interrupted here if I tell you my story?"

"Not at present. No one goes out early here."

"Then come and sit down, and I will tell you," and he led her to a sort of covered bower which had been constructed in the wall. It was covered at the back by creepers, and a long curtain of passion-flower hung down in front of it.

“I did not write to you because I felt that I could better tell you all that was in my mind if I could look into your face, and read in your eyes all I hoped they would tell me,” he said, taking possession of her hand, and clasping it firmly between his own. “Maud, my darling, I need not tell you how dear you are to me. Don’t turn away ; look at me and let me see that you are not indifferent to my love. I fear that your parents may object—that they may not think me worthy of you ; but if you will entrust your happiness to my keeping, it will be the one endeavour of my life to prove worthy of that trust. I could not write this. I felt that I must have the answer straight from your own lips. Speak to me, dearest,” he continued, in great agitation ; “tell me that I am not

mistaken; for oh, Maud, I could not live without you—you are my life itself—a part of my being!”

Maud was so taken by surprise at his words, and the agitation so unusual in one so calm and strong as Stuart Leslie, that she could not reply. Her heart beat almost to suffocation, and she turned deadly pale. Leslie looked at her in dismay.

“You know,” she murmured, with a faint smile—“you know that I love you.”

He drew her to him, and, as her head rested on his shoulder, he gazed into her eyes with passionate fondness, as tears ran slowly down her cheeks, relieving a heart that had been long oppressed, but that was now overflowing with unexpected happiness.

For one of Maud's childish and impul-

sive temperament, she had suffered deeply, and this moment of certainty was to her one of unspeakable rest. She would have been content to remain nestling in Leslie's arms for ever, and, sheltered by the strength of man's deep love, to weep away the weariness of her spirit.

Those few moments of intense peace were never forgotten. They lived in her memory long after time had effaced the recollection of more recent events. In after-years they recurred to her with a sadness that testified to the truth of Dante's well-known lines :—

“Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi tempo felice
Nella miseria.”

Are there any human beings whose lives have been so sad or so stagnant that even

the pleasures of memory do not exist for them ?

Maud's nature was too elastic for it not to re-assert itself quickly, and she looked up with a countenance as changeful as an April day, saying—

“How foolish I am to cry when I am so happy ! Oh, Mr. Leslie, I know now how unhappy I have been !”

“And also, I hope, what little cause you had for unhappiness, as far as I have been concerned. But I cannot be ‘Mr. Leslie’ to you, Maud. Let me hear you call me by my name.”

“Stuart,” she repeated—“I don’t think I can. I should feel no reverence for you, if I were to call you ‘Stuart.’”

“I don’t want reverence,” he replied—
“only love—and that you have promised me.

But what are you thinking of?" he asked, noticing a sudden change in her countenance.

"Mamma. I am afraid she will be angry."

"Why? Has she such an especial dislike to me?"

"I don't think that she really dislikes you, but she has set her heart upon——"

"Upon your marrying St. Leger? So Miss Carysfort told me some time ago. But I do not think we need trouble ourselves about that."

Maud started up as she heard footsteps in the distance.

"I must go. I know some one will miss me."

"That cannot signify. It is your duty

to be with me now. I must find your father and speak to him."

"Not here," said Maud anxiously. "Wait till we get home before you speak to papa. We are going back in a day or two."

"But I do not know that I shall be invited to Hurst Manor again. As it is, I have been patient too long, Maud. I have not any more patience in my nature."

"But it would be so dreadful for people to know here. Pray—pray, wait."

"That is as you will; but I must see your father," he said decidedly. "Why will you leave me now? When shall I see you again?"

"I don't know," she replied, disengaging herself from his arms, and escaping from his attempts to retain her. "I must go."

now," and, rushing upstairs into her own room, she locked the door, sat down to breathe freely, and to exult over her happiness, though it was mingled with some apprehension for the future. She was too happy and too full of hope to leave much room for fear.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER Maud had left him, Leslie went in search of Mr. Hasseldine, but failed, as he had gone away early to a meeting at some distance, and was not to return till the evening. Leslie did not wish to have any dealings with Mrs. Hasseldine, and in consequence was obliged to defer his communication till the next day.

“I am anxious to have some conversation with you, Mr. Hasseldine,” he said, when they parted that night. “When shall you be at liberty?”

“I do not think it is of much use to at-

tempt to do anything in the way of business here," he replied, at once concluding that Leslie wished to consult him in some money transaction. "But I shall be at home the day after to-morrow. Will you come over and join us, and, better still, go with us, and then I can promise to give you my best attention."

"I will gladly return with you to Hurst Manor," said Leslie, eagerly, "if you are sure it will not be inconvenient to Mrs. Hasseldine, for I am anxious to speak to you as soon as possible."

"Well, then, let that be settled. It is only a delay of twelve hours, which, I hope, is not of much moment in your affairs."

Mr. Hasseldine had no idea of what the affair in question might be. If he had, or if he had known of his wife's manoeuvres

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to separate Maud and Stuart Leslie, he would not, probably, have ventured on such an unauthorised step as inviting him again to Hurst Manor. The fact was that he had absolutely forgotten all that she had said against him, and, as he himself had always had an especial liking for him, was glad to show him hospitality. He was consequently rather dismayed at the avalanche of abuse that fell upon his unhappy head when he informed his wife of the invitation he had given Stuart Leslie to return with them to Hurst Manor the following day.

“You are joking, Mr. Hasseldine. I feel sure you cannot have done anything of the kind. Ruining the prospects of your own child! I never will believe that you can be so infatuated.”

"My dear, I think you are crazy," said her husband, looking at her with unfeigned astonishment. "Leslie wants to see me on business; I believe to consult me about some other investment for his money, or possibly the security of the Spanish bonds. Here I have not a single paper, or anything I can refer to, and I am not going to trust my memory about business, especially if, as I suspect, it refers to some I transacted for him many years ago."

"I don't believe it to be anything of the kind," returned Mrs. Hasseldine vehemently, with a vigorous recourse to her pocket-handkerchief and smelling-bottle. "I believe it to be nothing but a ruse. That man is determined to creep into the family, like a vile serpent, poisoning us all, and

you will be sorry enough for what you have done when he has played his game out."

Mr. Hasseldine, utterly mystified by his wife's oracular manner and words, looked at her for a moment in silence, and then left the room. He met his daughter going into her own room, which was next to her mother's, and, following her in, sat down in an arm-chair, trying to collect his ideas, which had been utterly bewildered by his wife's vehemence.

"Well, Pussy," he said at length, "we are going home to-morrow. I hope this fine place and all these fine people have not put you out of conceit with your own home."

"I don't think this place half as pretty as Hurst Manor, papa. Do you?"

"I like home much the best, but then I am growing old. Your mother is very angry with me because I have asked Leslie, who wants to see me on business, to come back with us. I hope you have not taken against him as she has."

Poor Mr. Hasseldine was given to blundering.

"I have not taken against him, papa," she replied, blushing deeply, and burying her face in a vase of roses that stood near her. "What does he say? Will he come?"

"Yes; he wants to consult me about investing some money." Mr. Hasseldine had said this to himself till he entirely believed it. "And I told him he had better come to Hurst Manor, where I have all my papers, and everything relating to business.

But I have had a precious wiggling from your mother in consequence."

"Why does not mamma like him?" asked Maud, leaning out of the window to gather some jessamine, and trying to speak indifferently.

"Upon my soul, I don't know! Yes, by-the-by, I do," he said, recollecting all his wife had formerly said, and feeling that in some way he was complicating matters by talking to Maud. "But never mind, pet, you had better not say anything to your mother about it."

"Very well, papa," said Maud demurely. "I daresay mamma will not tell me."

She was very much surprised at hearing that it was about money that Stuart Leslie wished to see her father, and longed to in-

quire if that was the only subject on which he had spoken the previous day ; but if he had spoken at all, she wondered greatly that he had not alluded to the real nature of his business.

Maud had for the moment forgotten that she had begged him to defer speaking to her father until they had left the Abbey. She was thankful they were going home. It was very difficult to be there, though she was so happy. She was thinking over some of the incidents of the preceding day, when Stuart had evidently expected her to be his companion, and when she did not fall in with this, from her dread lest anyone should guess at their relationship, how she had noticed a deeper shadow on his face than she could see unmoved.

“I did not expect that he would appear so much annoyed,” she thought, continuing her speculations, “for he knew how I felt really, and he ought to have trusted me. However, now we are going home, and it will be all right then, if mamma does not spoil it all by being vexed, and if papa only will not mind her.”

As soon as possible after their arrival at Hurst Manor, Stuart Leslie found an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Hasseldine. His communication was received not only with evident surprise, but also with a gravity and uneasiness for which he was not at all prepared.

“I must speak to Maud myself,” he said, after some hesitation. “I must ascertain her feelings before I can give any

reply. She is so young, so very young, at present."

"Yes, undoubtedly," replied Stuart Leslie, nettled at what he considered to be Mr. Hasseldine's somewhat ungracious mode of proceeding; "but beyond the disparity of age, which I grant is considerable, have you any further objection?"

"No, certainly not—by no means," said Mr. Hasseldine, in an uneasy, hesitating manner; "but, of course, I must also consult her mother. Has Maud herself any idea of your feelings towards her?"

"Yes, for I had a few minutes' conversation with her at Conyers Abbey, and I do not anticipate objections on her part. I most earnestly trust, Mr. Hasseldine, that you will give your consent to a mar-

riage in which the happiness of our lives is involved. I wish also to tell you that nothing was ever further from my intention than to speak to Miss Hasseldine before I had received your permission to do so; but when Mrs. Hasseldine so decisively negatived my proposal of paying you a visit here, and was, as I supposed, unwilling to give me any chance of seeing your daughter, I thought it better to take advantage of the first opportunity to make her acquainted with my feelings towards her."

"I do not exactly understand," replied Mr. Hasseldine, looking puzzled. "When did my wife prevent your coming here?"

"I wrote to Mrs. Hasseldine three weeks ago, asking permission to come here on my way to London, but she said it was

quite impossible, as you were going away, probably for some time."

"The deuce she did!" he muttered—"that was taking the law into her own hands with a vengeance. However, I will speak to Maud as soon as I can," he said aloud. "She is such a child, and has seen so little of the world, that I doubt her knowing her own mind."

"If you will entrust her to me, Mr. Hasseldine," said Leslie earnestly, "it will be the one aim of my life to make her happy."

"I believe it," he replied frankly, grasping Leslie's hand—"I believe it entirely. I know of no one to whom I would more gladly confide her; but still it does not altogether rest with me, and I confess to

a shrinking from parting with the child who has been the sunshine of her home," he added, with considerable emotion.

The next morning, Mr. Hasseldine called Maud into the library to tell her of Stuart Leslie's proposal, adding that he had no knowledge of her feelings towards him, and that there was so much disparity of age that he had declined giving any answer at present, and begged her to consider well whether it would really be for her happiness to bind herself for life to a man who was so much older than herself, and who was in every respect so much her superior.

"I suppose he does not think so, papa," Maud said quickly, rather affronted at her father's words, "or he would not wish me

to be his wife. He is older, of course, and very clever; but I should not look up to anyone who was not."

"I am not speaking entirely of age, but he is very grave and reserved. He likes quiet and study, and you are so young, and have, as yet, seen so few people, that I do not see how you can know that of all men he is the one you would prefer."

Maud was silent for a minute, and then said,

"I cannot tell what might have been, if I had seen all the people you speak of; but, as it is, I am quite sure that I shall never like anyone better, or indeed half so well," she said, blushing deeply and speaking with an intensity of feeling that both surprised her father and convinced him how entirely she had given her heart to Stuart Leslie.

“And what about your mother, Pussy?” he said, putting his arm round her and drawing her towards him.

“That is what I am afraid of,” she said, her eyes filling with tears as she rested her head upon his shoulder. “I know so well mamma would like me to marry somebody quite different—somebody I could never care the least for.”

“Lord St. Leger, I suppose you mean. It would be a charming position for you, Maud.”

“But if I did not care for him, papa, it would not be charming, and I am sure you like Mr. Leslie,” she said pleadingly.

“I like him very well, but I do not want anyone to carry off my pet yet awhile, though she is so ready to run away from me!”

"You know I am not," said the poor child, hiding her face in her hands and bursting into tears, worried and nervous from a mixture of happiness and suspense.

"Well, never mind, Pussy," said her father, kissing her. "I was only joking. There is no good in worrying yourself. Of course I did not mean it. I will talk to your mother before I see Leslie again. I spoke to you, hoping to be able to tell him that you would not hear of such a thing, but I suppose you will not give me leave to do so now."

"Of course not, papa," replied Maud, smiling through her tears at the idea of anything so preposterous; "besides, he would not have believed you, but I do wish that you liked him better. You ought to be glad to have him for a son."

"I do like him very much, child. What would you have me say? And as to people doing what they ought—if they did, the world would be very different. There is your mother to be tackled now—no joke, I assure you," he said with a deep sigh.

This, however, proved a less difficult task than Mr. Hasseldine anticipated. She had foreseen, ever since Stuart Leslie's appearance at Conyers Abbey, what was impending, and received her husband's information in a cold and dignified manner, without expressing any surprise, declaring that she "washed her hands of the whole transaction," that she had long seen how little her wishes were considered, and that as Maud had chosen to blight the fairest prospects that a girl ever had, and her own father had assisted her in so doing, it was

not for her to interfere. She only hoped that it was not considered necessary for her to have any conversation with Mr. Leslie upon the subject.

"Well, my dear," returned her husband, considerably relieved at this comparatively mild reception of what he expected would bring a perfect torrent of reproaches upon him, or an hysterical fit, "if you cannot receive him pleasantly, perhaps it would be better not. It would only worry Maud, who has been crying bitterly in my room already."

"Why, when she has got all she wants?" asked Mrs. Hasseldine quickly. "Some people might think that if a girl was in trouble, her mother was the most natural person for her to come to. But I have no wish to force either affection or

sympathy upon those who do not want it," and, with a mother's tenderness and a woman's inconsistency, Mrs. Hasseldine began to shed tears.

Poor Mr. Hasseldine felt as if he should lose his senses between his own sorrow at the prospect of losing Maud, which was really very great, and the tears and complaints of his wife. But now that she had subsided into such a softened mood, he thought it would be wiser to find Maud, and desire her to go and speak to her mother herself.

"Please don't be angry, mamma," said Maud, clasping her hands round her mother's neck, "and please try to like Mr. Leslie a little, for my sake."

Mrs. Hasseldine disclaimed the first accusation, but declared that the last re-

quest was impossible. However, the mother and daughter mingled their tears together, and were restored to a more perfect amity than had, of late, subsisted between them.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW days of wonder, ill-nature, criticism, and congratulations—then it became an accepted fact in the eyes of the world that pretty Maud Hasseldine was going to marry Stuart Leslie.

Most people wondered at it, declaring that he was a man to inspire fear rather than love; others supposed that he must be fabulously rich. There were, however, only two people upon whom it had any lasting effect, or to whom it gave any real displeasure—those two were Lord St. Leger and Miss Carysfort. The former had been decidedly attracted by Maud,

and as his mother was continually telling him how much a marriage with the pretty heiress would please his father, at the same time assuring him that, as Maud had seen nothing of the world, he had the game very much in his own hands, he had thought of it and admired her till he had grown to consider her as more or less his own especial property, and he felt both annoyed and disappointed when the prize was snatched out of his hands. Miss Carysfort, on whom Stuart Leslie had made a great impression, had never relinquished the hope of ultimately becoming his wife. When she had met him at Middleborough he had paid her decided attention, and had shown her plainly that she was the only woman in the house with whom he thought it worth while to

converse. She had seen how much he had been captivated by Maud, but believing, as she did, that Maud was tolerably certain in the end to marry Lord St. Leger, and that her childish nature was eminently unsuited to Mr. Leslie, she only regarded it as a passing fancy. In fact, she did not at all appreciate Maud, or give her credit for the feeling and force of character which she possessed. She only judged from the surface, and that appeared to her slight and evanescent, but as yet the depths of her being had never been stirred. Maud Haseldine's nature was not antagonistic, but, when once fairly roused, was not easy to pacify or conciliate. Stuart Leslie had often perceived touches of waywardness in her, but as she had always yielded to his

calm, strong persistency, any opposition to his wishes from her was a thing to which he had never given a moment's consideration.

The first faint cloud that came over his lover-like dream, the first "little rift" that was destined to make a jar in the "lute," occurred one morning when Stuart Leslie told her that he had received a letter from his mother, which contained a message for her. Maud, who could not possibly have the smallest comprehension of Mrs. Leslie's stiff and old-fashioned habits, chose to consider herself aggrieved at receiving only a message instead of a letter.

"Pray tell the young lady from me," the letter said, "how glad I shall be to welcome your wife, and that though, as yet, I have no other house, I shall, as soon as she is established as mistress here, en-

deavour to find one, so as not to be in her way."

Maud read the message twice, and then, returning the letter, said—

"Does your mother always live at Carisbridge?—and is that all she says about me?"

"She tells me over and over again how glad she is that my hopes are realised. She knew what they were before I left her."

"But why does she talk of going away? I don't suppose we shall be settled there for a long time."

"Not quite immediately, perhaps. I hope you will not dislike the old place, Maud."

"I daresay I shall like it very well when I live there; but there are so many things

to be done first. You are to take me to Italy, and show me Venice and Florence and Genoa; and then I want to go about, and see new places every day; and, if we could, I should like intensely to see Jerusalem. It would be delightful to see all the places that I have read and wondered so much about."

Stuart Leslie was rather aghast at the prospect before him, but replied—

"I daresay we shall some day. We have plenty of time before us."

"No, indeed," cried Maud; "some day won't do at all. I want to go directly—as soon as we go away from here, I mean," she said, blushing. "And then, when we come back, it will be the London season, and I long for that. I have never been to London, except for horrible dentists and

shoppings,⁴ and I mean to go to operas and plays and balls every night; so you see it will be quite a year at least before we can settle at Carrisbridge."

"I don't think that will do, Maud," replied Leslie quietly. "The first thing I must do is to take you to see my mother. It would be only treating her with proper respect."

"I don't see that at all," said Maud, impatiently. "I might as well say that Mrs. Leslie has not treated me with proper respect, because she has not written to me."

"You do not know what you say, Maud, surely. It would give me great pain if I believed——"

"Of course I was only joking. You take everything so seriously," replied Maud,

recovering from her momentary pèttishness.

“But I do think that if we go abroad—and you know that you promised to take me,” she said coaxingly—“it will be useless for your mother to think of going away till we come back, and, even then, if she likes best to stay,” she added, seeing a cloud come over her lover’s face.

“We can talk of that another time,” he said. “As yet you and my mother have never met. We must go first to the old house. I am too proud of you, Maud, not to be anxious that all at Carrisbridge should admire you as I do—no—not as I do,” he said, looking at her fondly, “that is impossible. Do you know, darling, that I am sometimes afraid that you may repent having promised to bind yourself to such a grave old man as I am.”

"That is unkind, Stuart," said Maud, relapsing into penitence and humility. "I know I am ignorant and stupid, and sometimes impatient, and that I ought to be very grateful to you for caring at all about me—you are so 'superior,' as papa says, and indeed it's true. I am sure you know best about everything, and I am sure, too, you will do whatever I wish," said the spoilt child, who had never in her life been contradicted in any wish that it had been possible to gratify.

"If I can, dearest," he said, with a sigh, kissing her flushed cheek. But this conversation dwelt upon his mind, and made him anxious, and Maud often saw him looking at her that day with a troubled expression which increased her penitence for her momentary waywardness. The

truth was that her head had been just a little turned by the admiration she had met with at Conyers Abbey. That, and the passionate devotion of such a man as Stuart Leslie, made her imagine that all the world should do her bidding, and that her wish should be law to those around her.

Mr. Hasseldine was soon engrossed in preparations for the wedding, but Maud took very little interest in them. She thought it very charming to receive a new present every day, but lamented bitterly over the notes of congratulation that accompanied them, and which required to be answered.

"If I could only have a lithographed letter, mamma, and just add in the few

words that must vary, I should be so thankful," she said one day that her mother was reminding her of her sins of omission in the matter of letter-writing.

Mrs. Hasseldine looked shocked, but Mr. Leslie commended the idea, and declared that he would draw up a form to be sold by all booksellers like invitation cards.

The marriage was fixed for the beginning of September. It was to be a quiet country wedding in deference to Mr. Leslie's wishes, and not at all in accordance with those of Mrs. Hasseldine, but Maud so decidedly negatived anything that would alter its character that her mother was obliged to yield. Everyone was struck with Mr. Leslie's anxiety that the marriage

should be as quiet as possible, and how much more nervous he seemed to be than Maud upon the subject.

“Monday, the third of September, I find, is your day of doom, Mr. Leslie,” said Helen Carysfort, as she came into the library, where Stuart Leslie was writing. She had arrived only the evening before, to enact the part of bridesmaid, Mrs. Hasseldine having declared that one bridesmaid would be quite sufficient for such a wedding as this—“where they are going to walk across the garden to the church, and be married for all the world like dairy-maids and ploughboys, without anything the least stylish or elegant, and only for the whim of that strange Leslie!”

“I think not,” he said, with a start, in answer to Miss Carysfort’s question.

"Thursday was the day we fixed."

"Yes ; but have you not heard that Mr. Hasseldine has been subpoenaed, and must be at Liverpool on that day ? So Mrs. Hasseldine has been obliged to put it off till Monday."

"Why Monday, when Friday or Saturday would do as well ? I have an objection to Monday." And he spoke with so much annoyance that Miss Carysfort looked at him in amazement.

"Really ! Why ? Do you think of Monday as Black Monday ? To be sure it is called 'hanging day !' which some people might consider appropriate," she said, with a slight sneer. "Then Friday is an unlucky day too."

"Monday, the third of September ? It cannot be. I must speak to Mrs. Hassel-

dine about it," he said, rising at once, and leaving the room.

"How very extraordinary!" thought Helen, looking after him in a bewildered way. "Who ever would have imagined Mr. Leslie to be a superstitious man?"

"Maud," she continued aloud, as her friend entered the room, "do you know that Mr. Leslie is so superstitious that he refuses to be married on a Monday?"

"There is no necessity that he should be," returned Maud quickly. "I cannot imagine why mamma fixed upon that day."

"Why should you not be married on that day? Really, Maud, you are as absurd as he is."

"Very possible," she returned, colouring rather angrily; "but I am not going to be

married on a Monday, if he dislikes it—so I shall tell mamma.”

“You need not, for Mr. Leslie is gone to tell her himself, and very much surprised I should think she would be.”

Stuart Leslie found Mrs. Hasseldine considerably flustered by the change of plans, and in such a state of nervous worry that she could not make up her mind to any decision. He waited patiently, and then urged that the wedding should be put off till the following Thursday, which at last was arranged, though she declared herself extremely surprised “that he should be the person to wish for delay, though, as far as she was concerned, it made no difference. She could not put things on, but she could put them off as long as he chose.”

Thursday, the sixth of September, Maud's wedding-day, was as brilliant as sunshine and early Autumn tints could make it. A few of the nearest neighbours had been invited, the small village had been decorated for the occasion, arches of green were erected across the path which led to it, and poor children, in new dresses for the occasion, lined the way, strowing flowers at the feet of the bride. It was a pretty sight, and as the procession approached, the bells rang out cheerfully on the clear air. No tears were shed. Maud's varying colour alone showed how deeply she was agitated.

Groups of the villagers filled the church and churchyard, who all declared that a bonnier bride could never have been seen, and who all felt, and many said, that the

bridegroom looked too "serious" for the fairy-like girl who spoke the words out so "clear and brave-like," and who turned to him with such a confiding smile as they left the church together.

"One moment, Mrs. Leslie, if you can spare the time," said Lord St. Leger, when they returned to the house, without noticing Maud's start of surprise at hearing herself addressed for the first time by her new name. "I have a favour to beg—it is that you will wear this," and he put a case containing a magnificent turquoise ring into her hand. "I kept it to give you myself. I wished to see it once on your finger."

"Once!" replied Maud, blushing deeply—"I shall always wear it. How very good of you! It is quite beautiful!"

"That is not my only request," he said, retaining, for a moment, the hand which Maud had held out to him. "I want your promise that if ever, in after-years, any circumstances should arise in your life in which I could be of the smallest use or comfort to you, you will never scruple to ask me."

"Certainly I will, if——"

"I only said 'if,' remember, and you have given your promise," he said, with a smile, as he turned away.

"Look at Lord St. Leger's present—is it not beautiful?" she said to her husband, who came up to hurry her preparations for departure, for they were to spend a few days at Matlock on their way to Carrisbridge.

"Very beautiful! Where is St. Leger?"

I must thank him myself, now we have joint possessions," he said brightly, for the cloud that had hung over him for days had passed off, and he looked, as he felt, intensely happy. "Will you dress while I find him? I am afraid we shall be late."

Leslie went to look for his friend, but the servants told him he was just gone: He saw the carriage driving rapidly down the avenue, and stood watching it for a moment, and then said sorrowfully, "Poor fellow! I wonder if it was so? If I had thought it possible, I never would have urged his coming here to-day."

Everyone kept up bravely till the carriage came to take Maud away; then her mother cried bitterly, and the tears ran down Mr. Hasseldine's cheeks as he led her to the door. She struggled hard to

keep back the tears that would come, and the choking sensation in her throat prevented her speaking, but she threw her arms round her father's neck, and clung to him passionately.

"Remember, my darling, that your home is always open to you. If ever you wish to come here, come at once."

Was it Leslie's grave face, or some misgiving in Mr. Hasseldine's own mind, that possessed him to say those strange words? He scarcely knew that he had said them, but the expression on her husband's face recalled Maud to herself, and, springing into the carriage, she looked back with a bright smile that comforted her father all that day.

CHAPTER XII.

THE fortnight that Maud and her husband spent at Matlock came to an end, and much too soon to please her. She had been intensely happy. Young, and strong, and able to enjoy everything, the beautiful scenery and frequent expeditions to explore the surrounding country, delighted her, and the companionship of such a man as Stuart Leslie enhanced every pleasure.

“When can you tear yourself away from this enchanted spot, Maud?” he said to her one day, when she was expatiating rapturously upon the beauty of Chatsworth,

which they had just been over. "I am writing to my mother, and must tell her how soon she may expect us."

"Surely not yet. Oh! Stuart, we need not go away yet," said Maud sadly.

"Very well; we will put it off for a week, if you like, but I am anxious you should see the old place for the first time in fine weather."

He spoke cheerfully, but Maud heard him sigh as he sat down to write, and immediately repented not having yielded to his evident wish of going home at once.

As it fell out, nothing could be worse than the day of their journey to Carrisbridge. It was a day that is more common in Ireland than in England—a day of steady, hopeless, and incessant rain. Maud looked ruefully through the windows of

the carriage that had been sent to the station to meet them, over the wide tract of moorland which in sunshine had a wild rugged beauty of its own, but which now presented a picture of the extremest desolation. There was not a house, nor even a tree to be seen.

"It seems a long way off," said Maud at last, for the heavy carriage and the old horses did not at all keep pace with her impatience. "How much further is it, Stuart?"

"Nearly three miles. It is very provoking to have such bad weather."

"Three miles is not very far," said Maud brightly, "and I daresay it will be finer to-morrow for all this rain to-day. But it seems rather a dreary country. Is it all like this?"

Stuart answered her absently, and then fell into a fit of musing. He was wondering whether Maud would not find the Old House and its inhabitants quite as dreary and depressing as the lonely moorland through which they were passing.

It was getting dusk when he pointed to a light in the distance, and told her that was the house, at which they soon arrived. The old servant came quickly down the steps to meet them.

"What a funny-looking old man!" exclaimed Maud. "I am so glad we are here at last. But the steps are quite wet. Can I go up them as they are?"

"As they are!" repeated her husband, looking at her in some bewilderment.

"How can they be altered?"

"Not the steps," said Maud, laughing at

his face of consternation. "But I thought perhaps some one was going to bring a carpet. But it does not matter;" and, springing out of the carriage, she ran quickly up the steps into the house, without waiting for the umbrella, under which the old servant was vainly trying to shelter her.

They crossed the old hall, which looked eerie to Maud in its dim, half-lighted state, and went into the library, where Mrs. Leslie was waiting. She rose as they entered, and advanced slowly to meet them.

Maud gazed at the stately old lady, who looked as if she had walked out of a picture frame, with a kind of awe, and did not feel at all as if she could throw her arms around her, and beg her to love her for her son's sake—an interesting little

programme she had been rehearsing in her own mind.

"I have brought you my wife, mother," said Leslie, in a voice tremulous with repressed agitation. "I am sure you will give us your blessing;" and he placed Mand's hand in Mrs. Leslie's.

"God bless you, my daughter, and make your union with my son a blessing to this house!" said the old lady solemnly, as she stooped over Maud and kissed her.

There was a gravity in this reception that quite frightened poor Maud, and made her feel as if it was, in some way, a religious ceremony, or as if she was in a church, and ought to kneel down and pray. She was too shy to make any reply.

"Maud is tired, mother, with her long,

wet journey. She had better go to her room and prepare for dinner."

"Certainly. Abigail," she said, turning to her companion, "this lady is my son's wife. Will you take her to the apartment that has been prepared for her? I have some difficulty in ascending the staircase, my dear, or I would take you myself;" and Mrs. Leslie looked down kindly on the fair young face that was looking up at her so gravely.

Maud had some difficulty in repressing a smile as the antiquated spinster trotted up to her. Her dress was so peculiar, and she was altogether so unlike anyone that Maud had ever seen. Her nervous, apologetic manner, also, combined with her incessant chatter, almost bewildered her.

"Miss Campbell will take you to your

room, dearest," said Stuart, in a low voice. "I will come up in a few minutes, and bring you down to dinner."

"Very happy indeed; delighted to have the honour and pleasure," said "Old Abigail," as Stuart had always disrespectfully called her, bobbing her head down at every word she spoke, as if she were a puppet jerked by some unseen mechanism. "Very happy indeed to show you your room, young Mrs. Leslie—the large apartment on the first landing, which Mrs. Leslie considered the most fitting. This is it," she said, throwing open the door of a large, oak-panelled room, in which an enormous four-post bed, with dark green hangings, stood, like a great catafalque, against the wall. Candles were lighted on the dressing-table, but there was no fire; and,

altogether, the impression it gave was chilly and dismal to the last degree.

"Don't go. Must you go?" said the poor child, looking round the half-lighted room. "Will Roberts come if I ring?"

"I will go and send your maid; young Mrs. Leslie, if you want her," said Abigail Campbell, bobbing and nodding till Maud thought that eventually her head must roll off. "Perhaps you would like a fire," she added, perceiving that Maud shivered, "though we have not begun fires yet. We never do till Michaelmas, and yet it is very cold sometimes before then."

"Thank you," replied Maud eagerly, feeling that a fire would greatly increase the cheerfulness of her abode. "But here is Stuart," she said, with a sigh of relief,

as she heard his step on the shining, uncarpeted stairs.

"Well, darling, are you very tired?" he said, drawing her towards him, and kissing her fondly, as soon as Miss Campbell had taken her departure. "This room looks somewhat dark and dreary to-night, but we shall soon mend that, I hope."

"I should like a fire, Stuart," said Maud. "It seems to me so cold here, and that funny old lady said that I might have one."

"Might, Maud!" repeated her husband. "Why, who do you suppose is mistress in this house?"

"I don't know," said poor Maud, equally inclined to laugh and cry. "Everything is so strange here. It is dull and dark, and yet this old house is romantic, and like a

book. I can fancy that it was living in this old place that first made you write, Stuart. It is really nicer than a commonplace comfortable house," she said cheerfully, as she followed her husband downstairs.

Leslie was pleased at his mother's evident admiration of his young wife, when she sat down to dinner under a glow of lamplight.

"All the other rooms," Maud said to herself, "were only lighted enough to make darkness visible."

She did look particularly pretty and picturesque, with somewhat dishevelled hair, and a brighter colour than usual, which shyness and excitement had given her.

She was very silent that evening, as the

conversation between Stuart and his mother was principally on local subjects, of which Maud was entirely ignorant. She answered Miss Campbell's inquisitive remarks as patiently as she could, but the dinner and evening appeared to her insufferably long and tedious, and she longed for the morning, when she could ramble over the old house alone with her husband, away from "those stiff, tiresome old women," as, in her disrespect, she already mentally called them.

The next day was fine and bright, and, with the sunshine, Maud recovered her gaiety. As soon as breakfast was over she sat down to write a note to her mother. As yet she had never omitted to do this, knowing that her letter was the one event of the day to her parents. She

could only tell them of her journey and arrival, and was glad to put off describing her home till the gloomy impression that, at first sight, it had given her had been effaced. Then she put on her hat, and sat waiting for her husband to come and walk with her as he usually did. After looking through the window for some time upon an especially melancholy garden without any character of its own, though it was tolerably well kept, she wandered into the hall, where she found Miss Campbell in a wonderful bonnet that she kept in the hall for short excursions into the yard to feed the chickens. She had been doing this now, and had a basket of corn in her hand.

"Have you been out, young Mrs. Leslie?" she asked, throwing out her words

with a jerk, as if she were going to feed the chickens with them. "Delightful day after yesterday!"

"I have not been out. I am waiting for my—for Mr. Leslie. I do not know my way about the house, nor where I am likely to find him."

"He is out. Mrs. Leslie and Mr. Stuart went out immediately after breakfast. They went to the farm, I conclude. Shall I show you the way?"

"No, thank you," replied Maud quietly, but feeling both hurt and angry that, on her first arrival at her new home, Stuart should have left her to her own devices. She did not wish that the "horrid old woman" should see her annoyance, and, making some excuse for leaving her abruptly, returned to the drawing-room.

She stood for some time with her hat in her hand, wishing to set off alone to explore the place. If it fell out that she lost her way it would be a good thing, as it would alarm everyone and be a fitting punishment to Stuart for his neglect. But the wide tract of flat country stretching round on every side did not seem very propitious for that species of revenge, and while she was wondering what to do, and making a melancholy meditation upon the way she had looked forward to the first day in her new home, and how different all things were in reality and in anticipation, Mrs. Leslie's tall figure, as she leaned upon her son's arm, passed the window.

The bright look of genuine delight that overspread her husband's face at seeing her, made it difficult to her to meet

him with the resentment she had intended.

"I am so glad you are ready to go out, Maud," he said, looking in at the window. "Wait a minute till I take my mother upstairs, and then I will come to you."

Maud was very much tempted to refuse this invitation, and to show by her manner how deeply she was offended, but she thought this would be punishing herself as well as Stuart—a thing she was utterly disinclined to do. She heard her husband run downstairs and call to her from the hall.

"Come, Maud. I am waiting to show you the garden and the farm."

"I should not think there would be time," she said, without rising from her seat.

"Why?" he replied, coming into the room, and looking extremely surprised. "What is there especially to be done at this moment?"

"I mean," said Maud, moving slowly towards him, "that I have been ready to go ever since eleven o'clock, and it is now past twelve."

"I was obliged to go out with my mother to see the farm, and I thought you would not care for such a slow proceeding. I knew that you could scamper all over the place while she was crossing the garden."

"Then you did think about me, Stuart," said Maud, in a half penitent, half resentful voice.

"Think about you!" he repeated, in a tone of mingled pain and surprise. "Do

you mean that you really thought I had forgotten you?"

"I did not know, and I felt so lonely here. I do not even know my way about the house."

"It was an unkind thought on your part, Maud, and one I scarcely deserve," said Stuart, very gravely. "You must not give way to mistrust. Come out with me, and see if you think that you have any cause to think yourself forgotten."

Half ashamed of her pettishness, but still rather resentful, Maud took his offered arm, but instead of going into the garden as she expected, he turned down a long passage, and opened a door which led into a yard. They crossed it and went into the stables.

"Sims," he said to the old coachman,

who was sitting, apparently half asleep, basking in the sun, "you don't seem to have anything especially to do. I wish you would lead the little mare out for Mrs. Leslie to see."

"Heyday, sir? To be sure I will. She's been up this month past, and if ever there was a pictur' it's that there little 'oss."

He went into the stable, and returned leading a little Arab mare, quite white, and of such perfect symmetry that even Maud's inexperienced eye was immediately struck with it.

"Oh, Stuart, what a pretty horse! Is it yours?"

"No, it is yours. You often wished to ride, and I have had this little mare trained to carry a lady. She is perfectly gentle and good-tempered."

"How good of you, Stuart; and is this beautiful creature really for me?" said Maud, stroking the horse's neck, as it kept turning round and snuffing at her pocket in hopes of finding food.

"She expects an apple, or some sugar, Maud. You can bring some out another day, and then she will soon know you and follow you about."

"I used to ride a pony years ago, but I never learned to ride. Will you ride with me, Stuart, and teach me? When may I begin?"

"As soon as you like, or as soon as you can get a habit. That I conclude is necessary; but you must christen her, Maud," said her husband, pleased at her extreme delight.

"Has she got no name? I thought the

coachman called her something. Did you get her for me?"

"No; I have had her some time. I brought her and Selim—the horse I usually ride—from the East. Shall we call her *Blanche*, as she is so perfectly white?"

"I don't know. What did you call it?" said Maud, turning to the coachman.

"Heyday, ma'am, is her rightful name, I believe; not as I ever heerd of such a name for a horse save this here."

"It is an odd name, certainly—Heyday. What does it mean, Stuart?"

"She was originally called *Haidée*, after one of Lord Byron's heroines, but here, of course, the English word was substituted. I think you had better give her another name."

He seemed really to wish this, and Maud

declared that, as she did not like Blanche, it rested between Fairy and Daisy, the only names she could think of.

"Daisy is the best, but it is not very Eastern," he said, smiling. "Well, then, Sims, you must never let anyone ride her except Mrs. Leslie, and she must be called Daisy."

"Very well, sir ; I'll see to it, though to my mind that's a cow's name."

"How odd it seems, Stuart, that you should have this little horse just fit to carry me ! She is too small to be of much use to you."

"I have ridden her occasionally, but she was quite young when I bought her. She has been turned out for three years, and this year I had her up and got into condition."

"It is very odd—just as if you expected to have a small wife like me," she said, looking up into his face and smiling; but as she did so, she was struck with the expression of pain that passed over it. They walked for some minutes in silence, and then Maud, whose head was still running on the horse, said half shyly—"You never had a sister, Stuart, had you?"

"No; I am the only child. I believe there were other children, but they died in infancy, and I was the youngest."

"It does seem so strange that you should have this little horse—so fortunate for me!"

"I cannot see anything so extraordinary in it, Maud. You seem to think more of the marvel of my possessing an Arab mare than of its being a pleasure to you to have her."

"No, no ; you are quite wrong. I am so delighted, and so grateful to you. I am only longing to ride."

"We are not quite ready yet. You must get a habit, and I must send for a side-saddle. That is easily done, but I don't understand the process of getting a habit, as it must fit you."

"I do, though, and I will write about it to-day."

At the end of a week, both the habit and saddle arrived, and Maud, who had a natural love for riding, was quite fearless, and enjoyed it more than anything she had ever done. It quite compensated her for the dulness of the house, and her letters home were full of happiness.

CHAPTER XIII.

BY degrees a decided change was apparent at Carrisbridge, and Maud's life became less and less isolated. The fact of "that grave clever Mr. Leslie" having brought home a young and beautiful girl as his wife, had excited considerable curiosity, and far-off neighbours, who had long dropped their annual call upon Mrs. Leslie, considered it a duty to pay civility to the young bride. Maud, who was seldom at home when these visitations occurred, took but little interest in her neighbours, and always laughed at the

deep groan her husband gave whenever he came in and found a fresh array of cards on the table in the hall.

One day he took a card out from the rest, and stood considering it as if the small piece of cardboard had in itself any power of imparting information.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Normanton,” said Maud, coming behind her husband and looking over his shoulder to see what he had found to interest him so much. “Who is he? Do you know him? See; here are two more cards of his. What an extravagant man when one would have been quite enough!”

“He would not have thought so. He would not be satisfied unless he called upon us all separately. I do know him, and am sorry he is in this neighbourhood.”

"Why? Surely you need not see him if you dislike him, Stuart."

"I don't know that, for he is probably staying with the Johnstons, and they are certain to invite us to go there."

"Oh! but I could not go, Stuart," replied Maud quickly, "I should be terrified to go to a house full of strangers."

"I don't see why," said Leslie moodily. "Conyers Abbey was full of strangers, I suppose."

"That was quite different. I went with papa and mamma."

"And now you have only me to go with. Poor child!" said her husband, stroking the sunny hair that had fallen over her shoulders when she took off her riding hat. "I hope I shall prove a sufficient protector."

"Protector!" repeated Maud, opening her eyes very wide. "I don't want protection; but at Conyers Abbey I was only a girl, and mamma was there to do the talking—so it was different."

To that proposition Mr. Leslie entirely agreed, though he did not express how deeply thankful he was that Mrs. Hasseldine was not here to "do the talking."

"Besides, we are going away for the Winter, Stuart; are we not? How I wish I could take Daisy with me wherever I go!"

"You would find her more trouble than pleasure as a travelling companion," said her husband, laughing, as she ran upstairs to dress for dinner.

Stuart Leslie was doomed to be put out that day, for after dinner there was a

skirmish between Maud and his mother that annoyed him very much.

Mrs. Leslie had been flattered and gratified at the way in which Maud had been welcomed by all the county, and was anxious that she should not be backward in returning their civility.

"We have several visits to pay, my dear," she said to Maud after dinner. "When will it suit you to accompany me to do so? To-morrow is Saturday, but next week might be devoted to returning visits."

"Yes; but I need not go; or, if I must," she added, seeing Stuart look up as if surprised, "I suppose I can ride?"

Mrs. Leslie was silent.

"You cannot let my mother go alone to all these people," said Stuart in an under-

tone to his wife. Mrs. Leslie was rather deaf.

"I cannot be stifled up in that coach, I really cannot, Stuart. It would make me quite ill. It did the day I came here. An open carriage is bad enough."

"My mother never goes in an open carriage," said Stuart gravely.

"Very well; and I never go in a close one," she said pettishly. "Cannot Miss Campbell go?"

"Certainly; Miss Campbell shall go," said Mrs. Leslie, rising from her chair very slowly; "and you shall never have to complain of me again for intruding my company upon you."

"I am sure," said Miss Campbell, in her spasmodic manner, "it is not in the least fitting that I should accompany Mrs.

Leslie. Young Mrs. Leslie will see that it is right for her to go."

"As I do not care about doing right in things of that sort," returned Maud flip-pantly, "that is nothing to me."

Mrs. Leslie continued stiff and stately all the evening, and avoided speaking to Maud. Stuart was apparently absorbed in a book, till she began to feel considerably provoked, and as if she were being "sent to Coventry."

As soon as Mrs. Leslie had retired for the night, Maud asked her husband why he was so silent and grave.

"Because I have nothing to say, Maud, beyond my sorrow that you should be so disrespectful and disobliging to my mother, and you will not care for me to say that."

“But why is it wrong not to be able to go out in a close carriage,” exclaimed Maud, with flashing, indignant eyes. “It makes me feel sick, and I cannot bear it. Besides, I like to ride with you.”

“There are different ways of expressing the same thing, Maud ; and my mother is so little used to anything of this sort. I am very sorry that it should have occurred.”

“So am I, if it vexes you, Stuart,” said Maud frankly, putting her arm round his neck, and laying her head on his shoulder. “Don’t look so grave, and I will speak prettily to-morrow. Only if I must go at all to these people, let me go with you. Don’t look so grave. I am quite good now.”

“As good as a spoiled child can be, I

daresay," he said, kissing her fondly. But he did not recover his spirits, and, during the next few days, Maud often saw his eyes fixed upon her with an anxious expression. This rather troubled her, and she was also growing impatient under the constraint of her life. The atmosphere around her was one of such complete repression that it could scarcely fail to be irritating to anyone as young and full of life as Maud. She had no safety-valve for any exuberance of mood, whether of joy or sorrow, beyond her gallops on Daisy; and, though she was scarcely conscious of it, and if she had been, would have considered that it must be her own fault, was beginning to feel that her husband did not understand her, and that sometimes he was weary of her society. The fact was

that Leslie, having hitherto devoted so much of his time to literary labour, it was becoming inexpressibly irksome to him to spend day after day without any purpose beyond simple amusement. He often longed for a quiet morning with his books, and yet he did not like to throw his young wife either upon her own resources, or the society of his mother and Miss Campbell, which he knew to be uncongenial to her.

“I am too old for her. She is but a child yet,” was his ever recurring thought.

He did not see how easily Maud might be educated to share his tastes, how her love for him would in itself be a sufficient motive to her to undergo a training that might at first be somewhat irksome—for the single object of securing his companionship. He did not understand how to mould her

young and ardent nature so as to amalgamate it with his own, but, on the contrary, brooded over the disparity of years and dissimilarity of tastes till Maud, in her turn, grew morbid and fanciful, and imagined that he was weary of and disappointed in her.

There was a good deal of truth in both these imaginings, though not so much as each believed. Maud's elastic nature rebelled against sorrow, and tried to throw off her fits of depression, with the hope that their foreign tour would make Stuart "quite bright and happy again," while in reality the idea of leaving England was becoming more distasteful to him every day.

Meanwhile Autumn had advanced. The days were short and dark, and the few trees

that surrounded the house were stripped of their leaves by the wind which swept wildly over the Fells. The brown moorland looked dreary and desolate, divested of the purple tints that had given it a beauty of its own during the Summer, and the heavy mist that hung like a pall over the wide, flat tract of country would have deterred anyone less bent on excitement of some kind than Maud from continuing her daily rides; but to her air and exercise were life, and neither Mrs. Leslie's remonstrances, nor even her husband's face of hopeless resignation, could keep her in the house.

Still there was more life than had been for many years at Carrisbridge, for the Leslies had been obliged to accept some of the numerous invitations that had been

showered upon them. Stuart Leslie was always considered an acquisition, and Maud's beauty and bright taking manner at once enlisted everyone in her favour, and made her decidedly the fashion in the county. She so evidently enjoyed the change that her husband had submitted to the infliction with a tolerably good grace.

One wet afternoon, early in November, Maud was looking rather dismally through the window at the deepening twilight, after having wandered from room to room in search of some one to talk to, or some occupation that would not bore her very much. She was not very expert in the arrangement of her time, and, in fact, disliked all indoor employments, with the exception of reading. She had devoured

all the old-fashioned novels that could be found in the house, played with Miss Campbell at battledore and shuttlecock, written to her mother and Helen Carysfort, and had now returned to her husband's study with a rueful face at finding him so deeply absorbed in books and papers as to make her unwilling to disturb him. She was not quite at her ease with him, and generally entered his room under protest. She did not doubt his love, but she knew by a quick instinct that she did not possess his entire confidence. He received letters of which she knew nothing, and one day, when she met the old servant going with some in his hands into the study, she offered to take them in, but he refused to give them up, saying that Mr. Leslie

never allowed anyone, not even his mother, to touch his letters.

Maud felt very angry, and complained of him to her husband; but he gave some evasive answer, and the thing remained unaltered.

It was only from Miss Campbell that she could ever obtain any account of her husband's earlier life. All her conversations with him were of the present or the future—he never spoke of the past. She was pondering over this as she watched the rain against the windows, wishing “something would happen.” She did not much care whether the chimney caught fire, or a parcel of books arrived from London—anything to break the stillness and stagnation—stillness so trying to youth, so enjoyable to age.

At last she uttered a joyful exclamation, which made her husband look up.

“Oh, Stuart,” she exclaimed, “there are some people coming up to the house—gentlemen—with red coats and spluttered boots. How wet and tired their horses look!”

“People returning home from hunting, I suppose,” he replied absently.

“Yes; but they are coming here,” she persisted. “Who can they be?” and a loud peal at the door-bell testified to the truth of her words.

An ejaculation more forcible than complimentary to the visitors escaped Stuart Leslie’s lips, and the next moment a servant came in to say that Colonel Normanston, Lord St. Leger, and Sir Henry Johnston were in the drawing-room.

“Do go, Maud, and say I am coming,” said her husband impatiently.

“Oh, Stuart, I don’t know them, and I am such a fright—am I not?” she said, smoothing her hair and looking down rather wistfully at her short dark dress, which she had put on in the hope that the rain might clear off in time for her to go out. She stood before him waiting for his verdict, with her hands in the pocket of her black silk apron, and her hair tied up with a broad blue ribbon. He thought her as dainty a piece of perfection as his eyes ever rested on. His countenance must have expressed this, for she did not ask him again, but said with sparkling eyes,

“I shall be glad to see Lord St. Leger. I daresay he has brought some home news,” said Maud, as she skipped down the long

corridor to the drawing-room, where she paused for a moment, with her hand on the door, not liking to go in alone. She looked back to see if her husband was coming, but not hearing his footsteps, she went in.

The three gentlemen rose as she entered, and Lord St. Leger advanced eagerly to meet her.

"I am so glad. So surprised to see you in this part of the world," she said blushing, partly from shyness and partly from pleasure.

"I could not pass the house without at least trying to see you," he replied warmly. "I need not ask you how you are. I shall be able to give a first rate account of you when I go home."

By this time Leslie had come in, and

Maud was formally introduced to Colonel Normanton. Sir Henry Johnston she had already met several times, but all her attention was given to Lord St. Leger.

“Have you seen papa lately, and is he well? Of course Hurst Manor looks ugly and dreary now, though not like this, I suppose. Were you ever here before?” she asked in a breath.

Lord St. Leger said that he had been staying at Camelford—Sir Henry Johnston’s place—several times.

“Then you know Carrisbridge. Why did you not tell me? We are going home soon, before we go abroad. At least you said so, Stuart, I think,” she said, turning eagerly to her husband.

“Of course, if you like,” he replied, with a smile, but his manner was constrained,

and Colonel Normanton fixed his eyes curiously upon Maud.

His look suddenly reminded her of the conversation she had had with her husband the day that she had found Colonel Normanton's card upon the table, and she too looked up with some interest and curiosity. He was a tall, dark man, with good features, but it was not a pleasant countenance, though he was considered handsome. The peculiarity of his face was its strong impenetrability. It was impossible to read it. Some one said he had bad health, some bad spirits, some that he had never recovered from an early disappointment. Men said that no one could ever know him, and that he was "a dark horse." Still, as he was a good shot, a good rider, and a good whist player, he was decidedly popular, and considered

an acquisition in a country house. After one glance, Maud turned away. She disliked his expression, and felt a strong antipathy to him, almost amounting to fear. Most people were rather afraid of him. He was conscious of this, and gloried in it.

"I hear you are a great rider, Mrs. Leslie," he said, going up to Maud and addressing her directly. "This is a capital hunting country, and there are two meets next week at an easy distance from this place. I hope that we shall see you out, or at all events that you will ride over and look at us."

"I do not think that either Mrs. Leslie or her horse are sufficiently experienced to be trusted in the hunting-field," said Leslie, coolly.

"Oh, Stuart! Could I not go just to see the meet?" said Maud, eagerly. "I am sure Daisy would be quiet."

"Where is it?" asked Leslie of Sir Henry Johnston.

"Near Escrigg Moor. You and Mrs. Leslie had better come over and stay with us next week. We shall be sure to find something steady for her to ride."

"I hope you will," said Lord St. Leger. "We will all take care of you."

"But I should like to ride Daisy," said Maud. "She is so pretty—an Arab, and quite white. I should like you to see her."

"I hope I shall see her. Come, Leslie, you must promise to come."

"You must let me leave it open, Johnston. I do not know what engagements I may

have for next week," said Leslie, ignoring Lord St. Leger's remark.

"I shall not let him keep any but this," exclaimed Maud, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, forgetting all her shyness in her excitement.

"Come, St. Leger, we shall be benighted," said Sir Henry Johnston, a cheery, burly, north country squire, who had no thought beyond his horses and dogs, and whose hints to return had been hitherto quite disregarded by his companions.

Colonel Normanton rose at once, but Lord St. Leger lingered. There was a warmth, and even tenderness, in his manner as he, at last, took leave of Maud that surprised her, and she sat for some time looking into the fire, and thinking that she

had never known what a pleasant man Lord St. Leger was ; how bright, and gay, and how easy to live with. But she almost instantly repented of the thought as disloyal to her husband, "for," as she said to herself, "what was Lord St. Leger to her ?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE unexpected visit had satisfied Maud's wish for "something to happen," and was quite an important event in her estimation, involving, as it did, the prospect of spending some days at Camel-ford. She wondered whether her husband would accept Sir Henry Johnston's invitation. She hoped that he would—it would be so pleasant to see Lord St. Leger again ; and though the impression Colonel Norman-ton had made upon her was anything but pleasant, she found his tall figure and dark, scrutinising eyes coming continually

before her. She was still sitting on a low stool before the fire when Leslie came into the room to look for her.

"Have you actually been sitting here in the dark ever since those men went away?" said Leslie. "Your meditation must have been a very pleasant one."

"I have been thinking of home and of Lord St. Leger," said Maud dreamily.

"So I concluded," he replied coldly.

"I mean," said Maud, starting up, recalled to consciousness by the change in her husband's manner, "that he reminds me so much of home, and it was odd to see him here. Shall we go to Camelford, Stuart?"

"I don't know—certainly not, if it is to transform you into a masculine woman. I hate women to hunt."

"Then I would not do it. I would never do what I knew you disliked."

She spoke quietly and sadly, and Leslie immediately reproached himself for being a kill-joy and a wet blanket upon her youthful spirits.

"I am too old and grave for you, darling, I fear," he said, drawing her towards him, and leading her out of the room. "You must not sit dreaming any longer here in the dark. I will do what you wish about going to Camelford. Should you like to go?"

"Yes, of course, if you did not dislike it, Stuart."

"Then I will write to Johnston to say that we will come next week."

"Thank you, Stuart. How good you are!" said Maud gratefully; "and then

you will take me to see the meet one day, I am sure."

When the visit to Camelford was definitely settled, Maud began to be rather alarmed at the prospect of a house full of strangers ; but it did not prove at all formidable, and she soon became quite at her ease. Sir Henry and Lady Johnston were kind, genial people, and she met with nothing but attention and kindness from all the party.

Maud was extremely happy at Camelford till the question arose of her riding to see the meet, and then she was mortified to find that Leslie negatived it at once. Lady Johnston, compassionating her evident disappointment, proposed to drive over to see it, as some of the other ladies in the house wished to go. This was very

little pleasure to Maud, but she felt the kindness of the intention, and tried to appear pleased.

"So you will not accompany us after all?" said Lord St. Leger, taking a seat by her at breakfast the morning of the hunt—he generally contrived to sit by Maud.

"No; Mr. Leslie does not think I ride well enough yet, and he disapproves of ladies having anything to do with hunting."

"Well, as a rule, I think he is right," said Sir Henry, "though I am sorry not to have the pleasure of offering you a mount, Mrs. Leslie. In some way or other, ladies generally seem out of place in the hunting-field. One has always to be looking after them, and, upon my word, I don't

understand how a woman can sit a horse at all."

"If you had been entrusted to me, I should have been only too happy to have taken charge of you," said Lord St. Leger, in a low voice, "though I must say that I think Leslie is right not to trust anything so precious out of his sight."

"What nonsense!" said Maud, laughing, though she coloured at his manner. "I am going to drive to the meet with Lady Johnston, and I think driving much more dangerous than riding. But I am really sorry not to be able to show you Daisy. I wanted you to describe her to papa."

Colonel Normanton, who was sitting on the other side, now looked up in rather a marked manner.

"I have seen her, Mrs. Leslie, and think her beautiful."

"You have!" repeated Maud, in a tone of surprise. "When and where?"

"Years ago, when she was not more than a colt, being shipped for England from Leghorn," he replied.

"How long Stuart must have had her, then!" said Maud. "I am surprised that he bought her. She is so much too small for him to ride."

"I don't suppose that he got her for himself," said Colonel Normanton carelessly.

"For whom then?" asked Maud, trying to speak indifferently. But her rising colour, and the quick beating of her heart, showed how anxiously she awaited his reply.

"Well, really, it is so long ago that I cannot profess to remember much about it. Till you spoke of her I had forgotten the circumstance. Have you ever asked Leslie why he got her?" he asked.

Maud was annoyed, as she thought she detected a smile, and imagined he had some deeper meaning in what he said; but she replied indifferently, feeling very indignant at heart at what she considered the impertinence of his manner.

"He would have told me without my asking, if he had thought I should care to know."

"Probably. I daresay. And after all," he said, in an undertone, though Maud, whose interest was excited, caught the words, "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis a pity to disturb it."

But Colonel Normanton's words and manner did disturb her very much. What could he mean?—and why was Stuart so annoyed at her asking any questions about the horse? Was it possible that there were facts in her husband's life that were known to others, and unknown to her? She could not believe it, and yet she pondered over it, and was so absent during the drive that at last Lady Johnston turned to her with a smile, saying,

“My dear, I am so sorry that we have no gentleman to amuse you. I fear you find us dreadfully dull.”

“Dull! Oh! no,” said Maud, distressed at her apparent rudeness. “I was only thinking—only wondering. It is a very foolish habit.”

“Surely thinking is not a foolish habit,”

said Mrs. Ainslie, an elderly lady, whose gentle face and quiet manner had taken Maud's fancy, "and as to wondering, when you are as old as I am, wonder will be a word probably expunged from your vocabulary. I have long ceased to be surprised at anything."

"Then you think the more one knows the less one expects, and that the only thing is never to hope, and never to trust anyone completely, Mrs. Ainslie. That is a dreary doctrine."

"I do not say that," said Mrs. Ainslie kindly. She had been much attracted by Maud's beauty, and simple, natural manner. "I consider mistrust an unwholesome state of mind to live in. Do you remember what Rochefoucauld says, '*Il est plus honteux de se défier de ses amis que d'en être*'

trompé,' and there are some lines of Mrs. Butler's to the same effect."

"I know them, I think," said Maud eagerly, as she repeated the following lines :

" ' Better trust all and be deceived,
And keep that trust and that deceiving,
Than doubt one heart which, if believed,
Had blessed thy life with true believing.

' Oh, in this weary world, too fast
The doubting fiend o'ertakes our youth ;
Better be cheated to the last
Than lose the blessed hope of truth.'

Do you mean these ?"

" Yes ; I think them very true."

" Only, if it is one's fate ever to be deceived," said Maud, with some hesitation, " it must be so hard to bear the pain—so hard to forgive the person that has deceived one that I think I would rather not run the risk."

"I hope you never may, my dear. But as to suffering and forgiving, that, you know, is only woman's lot."

"But I don't believe I could forgive a real injury," said Maud quickly.

"I think you could; and it would certainly be a great aggravation of your own suffering if you could not. Do you remember poor Mrs. Stanton's sad story, Lady Johnston? She might have been happy now, if she had not resisted all her husband's efforts at reconciliation."

"I never heard of it. What was it?" asked Maud.

"The marriage was quite a love-match—on her side, at all events, if not on his; but apparently he was as much devoted to her as she was to him. When they came to live at Stanton Ferrers, on the death of his

cousin, they were near neighbours to Lady Worsley, whose husband died a year or two before they came into possession. They soon became great friends and saw each other continually, and Lady Worsley consulted Mr. Stanton upon all matters of business. Mrs. Stanton was very well content that her husband should be the friend of one for whom she herself entertained so great an affection. It was only by the merest accident that Mrs. Stanton overheard a conversation from which she gathered that her husband and Lady Worsley—who was Lucy Claxton—had known and loved each other for many years—had, in fact, been engaged, and that their marriage was only broken off for want of means, for in those days Mr. Stanton was not even the heir to the pro-

perty to which he ultimately succeeded.

“Mrs. Stanton took the earliest opportunity of ascertaining the truth of the story, indignantly charging her husband with having deceived her, and left him on the impulse of the moment. She was at first deaf to all the entreaties of her friends. No explanation could satisfy her—no assurance that it was a keen sense of honour that prevented her husband from telling the love-story of his youth, could pacify her. She was inaccessible to reason. She saw in her husband’s continual intercourse with Lady Worsley only a fixed determination to indulge an unworthy passion at her expense, and, imagining that she had been a dupe and a tool in their hands, refused ever to see him again. She lives abroad entirely, and is, they say, a very

unhappy woman, for Mr. Stanton is dead, and she cannot now retrace her steps, or undo the past."

"It is a dreadful story," said Maud ;
"but I believe I should have done just the same."

"I think not. I think you would forgive anyone you loved very much."

"Not if he played me false."

"Look !" suddenly exclaimed Lady Johnston. "Here are all the huntsmen and the hounds."

"I hope your horses are quiet, Lady Johnston," said Mrs. Ainslie.

"Yes, they are quite accustomed to this sort of thing. We are in good time, you see," she said to Lord St. Leger and Colonel Normanton, who rode up to the carriage. "I hope you will soon find. I

am generally frozen with waiting before you make a start."

"What a pretty sight it is!" said Maud, looking eagerly at the gay crowd of red coats and the eager hounds. "But I see no ladies. I should not like to have been the only one."

"Then it is all right," said Lady Johnston smiling, "for I don't think Mr. Leslie would have liked it any better."

There was some little delay in finding a fox, but at last there was a shout, and they were off across country in a moment. Maud watched them as long as any of them could be seen, and then Lady Johnston suggested that they had better return home.

"You must be perished with cold, Mrs. Leslie."

"No, thank you, I am not cold; but am quite ready to go home. It was a very pretty sight. I am so much obliged to you for bringing me."

There was some desultory conversation during their drive back to Camelford, in the course of which Maud incidentally mentioned their scheme of a foreign tour.

"Really!" said Lady Johnston, in a tone of surprise. "Have you told Mrs. Leslie, for I always heard that she never would consent to her son's leaving England again during her lifetime?"

"I don't know if Stuart has told her," said Maud, "but we shall certainly go."

Lady Johnston did not reply, but Maud saw that she thought it improbable, and felt very angry that Mrs. Leslie should

be considered to have such undisputed sway over her son.

It was nearly three o'clock when they came in, and those who had not joined the party at Escrigg Moor were lingering over the luncheon. Mr. Leslie, who had excused himself on the plea of business, was still writing letters in the library when Maud went in search of him.

"Everyone has been looking for you, Stuart," she said, coming up to the table where he sat. "Have not you had any luncheon? Lady Johnston thought you must have gone out."

"I have had a biscuit and a glass of wine, and I did not want to go through the ordeal of a long luncheon, especially as you were not there, and I have not quite finished my letters yet. Be patient, if you

can, Maud, for five minutes, and I shall be at your service. Now they are done," he said, after a few minutes' pause, in which the quick scratching of his pen was the only sound to be heard, for Maud was sitting by the fire, deep in thought. "Tell me about your expedition, dear," he said, leaving the table and sitting down by her side. "Was it prosperous?"

"I suppose so," she replied wearily, "not that I cared much about it—still it was a pretty sight."

"You were disappointed not to ride, poor child, I suppose ; but it was much wiser not to attempt it, unless you rode a horse well accustomed to the sort of thing. It makes some horses half mad sometimes, and besides the cover-side is not the best place for ladies."

"By-the-by, Stuart," said Maud abruptly, looking hard into the fire as she spoke, "do you know that Colonel Normanton says that he has seen Daisy?"

"Has he? He is very welcome. I hope she meets with his approbation," he said contemptuously.

"He saw her at Leghorn when she was being sent to England."

"Possibly. I believe we met at Florence that year, and he might have been at Leghorn, for all I know."

"He said that you did not get Daisy for yourself."

"Did not I? Then perhaps he can tell you for whom I got her."

"He told me nothing—only advised me to ask you."

Leslie turned pale with anger, but put

a great constraint upon himself, and remained silent while she, though considerably frightened at the effect of her words, persisted in her inquiry.

There are natures so impatient of all restraint that even an evasive answer awakens in them a spirit of opposition, and they will not rest contented with it, but insist upon their demand being attended to.

"Whom did you get Daisy for, Stuart?"

Maud asked.

Then he spoke, dropping out his words one by one in a cold, bitter, guarded manner.

"Maud, you had better learn, once for all, that I never will allow strangers to interfere with my affairs. I told you my opinion of Colonel Normanton; but as you

have chosen to disregard my caution, and have allowed him to prompt you to ask questions which do not concern him, it proves to me that you are too much of a child to be trusted, and that it will be better for us to return home to-morrow."

This was more than she could bear patiently—to be treated and punished as a naughty child for having asked a simple question.

"I don't know what you mean, Stuart, about being trusted. I could not have believed that you would be so unjust. And as to going away, we promised Lady Johnston to stay till Saturday. How could I help hearing what Colonel Normanton said?" she continued, in great distress.

Injustice was a trial that was quite new to Maud. She had seen tiffs between her

father and mother—tiffs of short duration, and devoid of any ill-will; and as to herself, no one had ever been seriously angry with her in her life, and now, suddenly, to have to consider her husband, who had hitherto appeared to her almost faultless, as ill-tempered and unjust, was in itself an acute pain, and she burst into tears.

“I advise you not to make any scene. It will not in any way assist your tactics,” he said coldly; and, without taking any further notice of Maud, he collected his letters and walked out of the room, leaving her bewildered, thunderstruck, and miserable.

She strove to collect her thoughts, but she was like one who had been stunned. She could scarcely believe her own senses. What had she done? Where was she

wrong? The more she reflected, the more indignant she grew, till at last she persuaded herself that her husband must be ill. Nothing less than that could account for the strangeness of his behaviour. Still the first germ of distrust had been sown in her heart that afternoon.

She only saw Leslie for a moment before dinner, and then she was unable to detect anything especial in his manner, so she hoped that the cloud had passed away, and began to look upon the scene of that afternoon as a dream.

The real onus of Mr. Leslie's behaviour to Maud rested with his mother. She looked upon her daughter-in-law as a mere child—one who had to be educated, schooled, and trained. She was always talking of her in that sense to her son,

who, from long habit, quickly imbibed his mother's notions. Maud's own behaviour, and entire dependence upon him, and the resourceless life she led, predisposed him to adopt his mother's views. Mrs. Leslie had also continually lectured her son upon the responsibilities that his wife's youth and inexperience entailed upon him, till he was so impressed with the idea that his life became a burden to him.

Married late in life, after the freshness and brightness had been taken out of her youth, to a man who was younger than herself, and who leaned upon her strong and determined character, Mrs. Leslie was scarcely likely to have any sympathy with Maud's girlish and impulsive nature, and, like many other people, having adopted one view, she lost sight of all others. Nor

was she disposed to give up the empire over her son, which she had held so long, without a struggle. She was scarcely conscious of this, but habit is strong, and in her case was especially so. To surrender the reins to a child like Maud was, she considered, to abandon her son to ruin and misery. Lovely she admitted Maud to be, but nothing more. Her strong prejudices prevented her discerning that there was also a strength in her daughter-in-law.

Maud's character was by no means weak. The spoiled child of her parents, to whom her slightest wishes had been law, she had become wayward, impulsive, and, in a sense, capricious. But these were the results of the circumstances of her life. They were only superficial, and overlaid a warm and generous nature, great capabilities of self-

sacrifice, and a strong will, which, not having been called into action, excepting in the single instance of her marriage, was scarcely apparent to those who had known her best. Mrs. Leslie did not know that she was calling into active existence a power which even she would not be able to master. Had she been aware of this, would she have modified her tactics? Who can say what the love of power is in some natures?

"I am so sorry, so disappointed to hear that you must leave us to-morrow, dear Mrs. Leslie," said Lady Johnston, after dinner.

"Oh! must we?" said Maud, starting and colouring. "I am very sorry. Mr. Leslie said that he was afraid that he must, but I hoped——"

"But you will come again soon, and pay your debt to us, I hope," said Lady Johnston kindly.

Maud made an ineffectual attempt to induce her husband to reconsider his decision, but without effect.

"I wish that I did not live so far off," said Mrs. Ainslie to Maud the next morning, while she was waiting for the carriage. "I could venture then to ask you to pay me a visit."

"I should like it so very much," said Maud eagerly. "You have been so kind to me, and nothing is really far off now."

"It has been a great pleasure to me to see you," said Mrs. Ainslie. "You remind me so much of my own child."

"Do I?" said Maud timidly.

"I lost her many years ago, but no one else has ever reminded me of her. I lived in London then, but now I have taken a small house in Durham—under the shadow of the cathedral. I am afraid you are not likely to come there."

"Except to see you—then I would go directly."

"Ah! you are not alone," said Mrs. Ainslie, shaking her head; "but if there should ever be a time in your life in which I could be of the slightest use or comfort to you, promise me that you will come to me at once."

"I will—indeed I will, dear Mrs. Ainslie," said Maud, kissing her, while the recollection of Lord St. Leger's words on

her wedding-day instantly recurred to her mind. "How very strange!" she thought. "I wonder why everyone expects something to happen to me?"

CHAPTER XV.

ALL the party followed the Leslies into the hall, and everyone expressed regret at their departure. Lord St. Leger put Maud into the carriage, and then stood for a moment with his hand on the door as he said,

“I must come over to see you for my last instructions before I go to Hurst Manor. I hope that I shall find you at home.”

“Of course you will, if I have any idea when you are coming. Can you come early and stay to luncheon, or could not you come for a day to us before you go

home? We are quite as near the railway at Carrisbridge as you are here."

"Thank you; I should like it extremely," he said, though with some hesitation, looking towards Leslie to second his wife's invitation. But he was busily engaged in arranging the window of the carriage, which would not shut, and Lord St. Leger could not catch his eye. "I will write and tell you when I can come over, at all events," he said, as the carriage drove off. "*Au revoir.*"

"I think it would be better for you not to give indiscriminate invitations, Maud," said her husband, as soon as they had driven some little distance in silence, "without first ascertaining whether it is convenient."

"Convenient to whom?" inquired Maud,

in a decidedly antagonistic state of mind.

"Of course it is convenient to me for Lord St. Leger to come, or I should not have invited him. He is a friend of yours, too; but if it was inconvenient to you, why did you not tell him so?"

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me, but you should remember my mother."

"Your mother!" said Maud, in a tone of surprise—"is Mrs. Leslie, then, so ill or so old that no one is ever to come to the house? That is unfortunate, for Helen Carysfort is sure to come soon, probably next week."

"Why sure?—have you invited her?"

"Of course I have, long ago, and I am expecting a letter every day to tell me which day she will come. She has been

waiting for her brother to bring her on his way to Scotland."

There was something so unusual in Maud's manner—something so determined and defiant—that Leslie felt it would not do to press her too far, so the subject was dropped, and he soon became absorbed in the newspaper till they approached the house. As Maud stepped out of the carriage she did not appear to notice her husband's proffered arm, but walked slowly into the house, and, passing through the hall, went straight into her own room, which, however, as she had not been expected, was cold and comfortless to the last degree, and, much against her will, she was obliged to go downstairs again to the drawing-room.

When she went in Miss Campbell was

talking eagerly and excitedly to Mrs. Leslie, but her husband was not there. Both started when Maud came in, and Miss Campbell trotted up to meet her, saying,

"Such a surprise, young Mrs. Leslie! Such an unexpected pleasure! It was only at breakfast that I said to Mrs. Leslie that, as we had not heard, Mr. Stuart was sure to stay at Camelford till Saturday."

"How do you do, Maud?" said Mrs. Leslie coldly. "I have only seen Stuart for a moment, and cannot at all understand what induced you to change your plans, without giving us time to prepare for your return."

"I never made any plans, and therefore never changed them, Mrs. Leslie, nor

am I responsible for taking you by surprise. You had better ask Stuart. The whole proceeding has been quite incomprehensible to me. I neither understand his motives nor his actions. He may be able to explain them. I cannot," and the scornful curl of her lip showed how aggrieved she still felt.

"It is so perfectly unlike my son to act in any way from caprice that I must conclude he had a very sufficient motive for his sudden change of plans," said Mrs. Leslie stiffly.

Maud was sitting, still wrapped up in bonnet and cloak, and Miss Campbell offered to take them off for her.

"No, I thank you," she said coldly. "I am only waiting till the fire is lighted in my own room."

There was a constrained silence for a few minutes, and then Maud said, suddenly—

“By-the-by, Mrs. Leslie, I had better inquire, while I think of it, if you have any objection to Lord St. Leger’s coming here?”

“Certainly not,” replied Mrs. Leslie, looking up in surprise. “How could I possibly object?”

“That is more than I know,” said Maud indifferently. “All I do know is that when I invited Lord St. Leger to come here for a day on his way home, Stuart said that I should not have ventured to do so without ascertaining whether it would be convenient to you to receive him.”

“Why do you speak as if this house were not your own to receive whom you

please," said Mrs. Leslie, in an agitated manner. "I cannot tell in what way I have encroached upon your rights so as to give you any just cause for doing so."

"It seems to me impossible to know what to do," said Maud wearily. "Stuart was very much annoyed at my inviting Lord St. Leger, here without asking your leave, and now you feel that my doing so is in some way a reproach to you."

Mrs. Leslie, who was really sensitive as to her position in the house, answered quickly and with tears in her eyes,

"You shall never again feel that you are not mistress of Carrisbridge. It was against both my wish and my judgment that I remained here at Stuart's request, and, as he gave me to understand, at

yours also ; but I will begin this very day to look out for another home."

"Pray don't," said Maud earnestly, at once repentant for having grieved "Stuart's mother," for it was only by keeping the memory of that relationship before her mind that she could tolerate the old lady. "I had no intention of annoying you by what I said, and Stuart would be miserable without you, and with me only," she added mentally, with a heavy sigh.

"Oh ! it was only a passing thought," chimed in Miss Campbell, quite dismayed at seeing how deeply Mrs. Leslie had felt Maud's careless words. "Young Mrs. Leslie never meant——"

"As it is quite impossible for you to know what was meant, Abigail, I advise you to say nothing about it," said Mrs.

Leslie, so sharply that the discomfited spinster retreated crestfallen, and became immediately absorbed in the mysteries of her everlasting knitting.

The next day Mrs. Leslie told her son that, in consequence of what Maud had said about Lord St. Leger, she would not remain at Carrisbridge longer than she could possibly help. Stuart strenuously combated this resolution, declaring that all he had said to Maud was simply with the intention of putting her on her guard against giving indiscriminate invitations, "for I find that Miss Carysfort and her brother intend to come here next week," he said, "and as I have never even seen him, and do not like her, it is not pleasant, and Maud is so young that she does not consider these things."

"What can you expect?" replied his mother. "She is a mere child," she added rather contemptuously, "extremely pretty, no doubt, and so an ornament at the head of your table, but, for anything practical, utterly useless. I do not know what sort of person her mother is, but Maud's complete ignorance of everything relating to housekeeping and the management of such an establishment as this"—and Mrs. Leslie here drew up her head proudly,—“has induced me to remain hitherto, that the economy I have practised for so many years may not be all thrown away.”

"Of course Maud is ignorant of these subjects as yet——"

"Yes, Stuart," interrupted Mrs. Leslie; "and has no wish to learn, that I can see."

“ You forget, mother, how young she is. But I have never considered her extravagant.”

“ If one may judge by her dress, I should say she is lamentably so. Rose-coloured silk, and white roses in her hair, when we are quite alone—and never the same gown two nights together !”

“ That may be my fault, poor child,” said Leslie, feeling considerable compunction at listening to the depreciation of his young wife. “ She knows that I like to see her well dressed, and she has herself a horror of anything ugly or dowdy. I believe it would be exactly the same whether she dined with twenty people, or alone with me.”

“ Humph !” said Mrs. Leslie. “ And do not you call that extravagance ? Things

were called by their proper names when I was young. Besides, I daresay it would all depend upon how much she wished to please any of the people she was to meet. And pray who is this Lord St. Leger she thinks so much about, and why has she invited him? Perhaps he was a former lover. I should not be at all surprised."

"My dear mother," returned Stuart gravely, "what reason can you have for suggesting anything of the kind? Maud may be childish, but she is no flirt, and I cannot doubt her devotion to myself."

"It may be so, but she did not speak much in that sense yesterday. In fact, I doubt if she has the power of appreciating anyone as clever as you are. But your extreme indulgence to her must, if she has

any heart at all, elicit gratitude, if not affection."

"I am very sorry to hear that you think so, mother," said Stuart sadly. "I had hoped things would have been very different. Maud was idolized in her own home, therefore coldness or disapprobation from you must necessarily be very painful to her."

"I suppose so," returned his mother quickly. "Anyone can see with half an eye that she is a complete spoilt child. It is to be hoped that you will train her to better things."

Though Leslie had defended his young wife to the best of his power, still his mother's words rankled, and left him in a very irritable state of mind. He did not feel, as many men would have done, that it

was incumbent on him to atone for Mrs. Leslie's harshness; but as sympathy and tenderness are so frequently withheld when they are most needed, he only felt extremely provoked with Maud for not having fallen in with his mother's imperious and old-fashioned ways, and reproached her for having said anything to renew the question of Mrs. Leslie's seeking another home.

Maud opened her eyes wide with indignation and amazement, protesting that she had only apologised for inviting Lord St. Leger, imagining that she was pleasing her husband by so doing. But there was an indifference in her manner that was quite unusual, and which should have made Stuart tremble for the bonds of affection and influence which his conduct to his

wife was so rapidly tending to destroy.

No further invitation was sent to Lord St. Leger, and consequently he only came over for the day. This both irritated and disappointed Maud, and induced her to appear especially demonstrative in her manner, and to devote herself exclusively to him the whole day—walking about the place with him, showing him everything, saying that he must describe it all at Hurst Manor.

Mrs. Leslie looked on in grim disapproval, Miss Campbell in bewildered amazement. Nothing could be deduced from Mr. Leslie's indifferent manner, and Lord St. Leger left Carrisbridge in great doubt as to the amount of good understanding that subsisted between Maud and her husband.

“At all events, the poor child cannot have much comfort with that dragon of a mother-in-law and that tiresome, chattering magpie of a companion,” he thought, as he drove away the same evening; “and as to that Miss Carysfort, I do not know whether she is to be looked upon as a friend or foe. Poor little Maud! I think I could have made your life brighter and happier than it is now.”

Helen Carysfort's presence, however, was a boon to the whole party. It freed Mr. Leslie from the necessity of finding amusement or companionship for the petted child “so little capable of rational occupation,” as he considered his wife. How few men make allowance for the absolute necessities of a young life, or understand that loneliness is a worse trial than actual

suffering. It was a great pleasure to Maud to have a companion in her rambles through that wild moorland, an object in her expeditions, and the society of some one with whom she could be under no constraint, and with whom she need not practise that system of repression so blighting to all natures, and especially to the young.

Helen Carysfort won golden opinions from all at Carrisbridge. She was pleased to find that she could make herself much more acceptable to Mrs. Leslie than Maud; Miss Campbell reiterated her praises, and Stuart Leslie himself wondered how it was that he had so little appreciated her at Hurst Manor. Everyone regretted her departure when the fortnight which had been allotted for her visit had expired.

But she was deaf to every entreaty to extend it, declaring that her brother was coming to meet her, and she could not possibly disappoint him; and, truth to say, though she had been curious to see Maud in her new home, yet, as soon her curiosity had been satisfied, she was ready to go, not having any wish, as she confided privately to her brother, needlessly to endure such unmitigated and monotonous dulness as life at Carrisbridge, under the present *régime*, must necessarily be.

“How does that pretty little fairy bear it, then?” replied Arthur Carysfort. “She looks the very last person to endure either monotony or dulness.”

“She does not bear it. She thinks she does, because she is a child, and does not know.”

"But what can she possibly do?"

"Leave it. You will see that she will not remain there for ever."

"Do you mean that she will leave it, or him? If I were you, Helen, I would keep out of a *fracas* of that kind. Leslie does not strike me as a pleasant individual to deal with in such a case."

"I understand him better than Maud does, and I think I might be useful to him."

"Whew!" replied her brother, as he looked at her in surprise. He never could understand his sister, and the subject was dropped.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





